



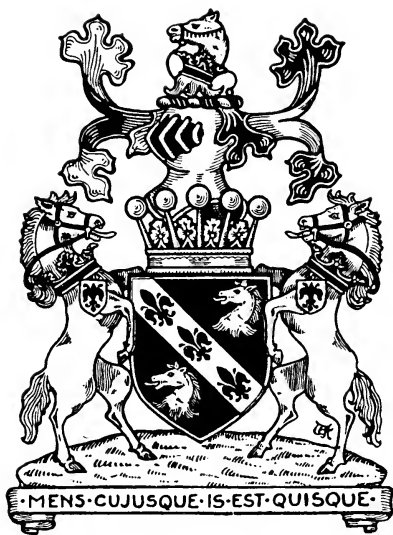


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*Atkinson*  
*1857.*

# RIVERSTON.

BY

GEORGINA M. CRAIK.

"The power, whether of painter or poet, to describe rightly what he calls an ideal thing, depends upon its being *to him* not an ideal but a real thing. No man ever did or ever will work well, but either from actual sight, or sight of faith."—  
BUSKIN.

"Forgive *me* where *I* fail in truth,  
And in Thy wisdom make me wise."  
TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON :  
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 65, CORNHILL.  
1857.

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# RIVERSTON.

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## CHAPTER I.

### SYDNEY'S DECISION.

By dawn next morning we had sent a messenger for Mr. Wynter: by night we hoped to have him with us. Throughout the day, while we waited his coming, there was little enough for most of us to do.

One out of our number alone was active. All that was to be done Mr. Kingsley did. He it was who became Mr. Rupert's nurse—who sent us hourly cheering reports of his condition—who devised and carried out a plan by which we might gain daily accounts of Mr. Leslie's state. The first of those accounts he himself delivered to

us at nightfall—but, alas, it was no good report ! Mr. Leslie was in great and imminent danger. The ball had entered the thigh, and had shattered the bone fearfully.

It was night when we learnt this. An hour afterwards Mr. Wynter and Sydney were at Riverston.

We gathered in the drawing-room together, and the tale was told them. An assemblage we were in that hour that I well remember. Mr. Wynter, with his angry tread upon the floor, and his broad, honest, inflamed English face ; Mrs. Wynter, in her restless uneasiness, upright in her arm-chair ; Helen, as ever, calm and grave ; Mr. Kingsley, the spokesman for us all, his erect, broad figure nearest to and brightest in the lamplight, his nervous doubled hand, as I recollect it resting—a very symbol of strength—on the table by his side ; last of all Sydney, the one motionless and silent figure there, standing by the broad mantel-shelf, with her arm in its familiar attitude upon it, with her white face, her closely pressed lips, and her shadowed eyes that so rarely—but twice

or thrice—rose up, beaming or flashing on some speaker's face.

“I think he may be moved very well in two or three days,” Mr. Kingsley said. “The most necessary step is to get him from this. Once in London, he may keep quiet till we hear more certain tidings about Leslie.”

“We may hear *that* before he is off, if he does not make haste,” Mr. Wynter answered in a tone of extreme annoyance as he paced the room. “Upon my word, this is a pleasant business for a man to come home to! I wish they had both been at the antipodes! As for Rupert, he has acted like an egregious idiot! It was what a boy of twenty might have done. I did not think he had been such a fool!”

Full flashing on him rose Sydney's fire-lighted eyes—one lightning glance.

“He was very bitterly tried,” Helen said gently. “The provocation was very great.”

“So great,” Mr. Kingsley said, “that if you had been placed in the position he was, Frank, I believe you would have done the same.”

An inarticulate response from Mr. Wynter ; then a pause ; then anew, impatiently—

“ Well, right or wrong——”

“ I did not say he was right,” Mr. Kingsley quietly interposed.

“ Right or wrong,” Mr. Wynter repeated in a louder tone, “ all I have to say is, we must get him away. You had better go over with me to-morrow morning, Gilbert, and let us see what arrangements can be made. As for that other scoundrel”—I looked at Sydney, but not a muscle moved—“ *we* can do nothing. I hope to God he may get over it ! If he does not, Rupert is as good as an exiled man. Poor fellow !”—and with something of a softened tone he stopped his walk, and sank into an easy-chair—“ poor fellow, it is hard upon him, after all !”

“ And when he has been, I am sure,” Mrs. Wynter murmured, “ almost like one of our own children to us”—and she burst into tears.

There was silence for a few moments : then at last, before any other spoke, Sydney moved and stood erect. One instant so I saw her, her white



face fixed and still, her lips firm set, passionate resolution in her whole look and gesture : ere this dumb picture had fixed itself upon my mind the place where she had stood was vacant. Swift and silent she had gone to where her father sat ; she stood before him, she stooped and took his hand in hers, and held it, crushing it, while she spoke.

Low and firm, though its accent was such as I had never heard from her before, her voice came—

“Father, you will be angry, but you must forgive me. You must let me have my will. If William Rupert goes away, I must go with him !”

I believe for a moment they thought that she had lost her senses: startling as her announcement was, for one moment utter silence followed it. The first sound that came was, a low murmur from Mrs. Wynter: not until that, too, had died were the strings of Mr. Wynter’s tongue loosed.

“*You—Sydney ! you !*” he stammered at last ;  
“*you go away with William Rupert !*”

“Father, do you not understand me ?” she cried.

And now at last, warm and rich, the colour flushed over brow and cheek.

No—understand her even yet he did not. But Helen did, and it was Helen whose arm a moment afterwards crept round her neck.

“Sydney, you are engaged to him!”

She cowered and shrank.

“No!” she cried passionately.

I looked at her—I, who knew many phases of that face, saw how fiercely her high pride was wrestling in it now; I, who knew not a little of the nature within that bosom, could form a tolerable conception at this moment of the feelings that were fighting in it.

My proud, reserved, impatient Sydney! They were all round her—father, mother, sister—all waiting with open ears to hear her confession. My own especial wonder was, that on the moment she did not turn and fly from the room. Whether it was most cowardice or courage that kept her in it, God knows—but stay she did, and speak too.

Crouching down on the ground, her face upon her father's knee, she spoke—

“He has asked me more than once to marry him. I never told any one, for I did not think till lately that I ought to care for him. But I would go with him now to the world’s end!” she cried; “and if he is in distress—if he is ill—it is all the more cause why I should stand by him, and tell you all that I love him more than the whole world—that, unless I marry him, I will never marry!”

As she ceased to speak she burst into a passion of tears; all sensitive love, all outraged reserve in her, forcing her into a paroxysm of emotion that she could not control.

“My dear, it was highly unfortunate that you found out all this just now,” Mr. Wynter said drily, after an awkward pause. “You are a good deal excited; do you not—do you not think that possibly you may be labouring under a mistake?”

“No!” calmly said a voice that was not Sydney’s. Neither Sydney’s nor any woman’s there. Mr. Kingsley it was who spoke, and Mr. Kingsley’s was the hand that passed for a moment over Sydney’s low bent head.

“There is mistake of no kind here, Frank,” he

said quietly. "Don't vex her with questions. You have got at the fact. She can't tell you any more. You must settle now what is to be done—Helen and Frank."

Mr. Wynter looked at his wife, and his wife looked anxiously at him. Before either of them spoke, Sydney had risen up and thrown her arm about her father's neck.

"May I go to him?" she said. "May I go to him?" was all she said.

"Sydney, you know very well," Mr. Wynter said slowly, "that if you had asked me as lately as yesterday for leave to marry William Rupert, I would have given it as gladly as I ever gave consent to any thing in my life—but it is a very different matter now. A father cannot lightly give up his child to the keeping of a man who may be indicted to-morrow for murder."

"Oh, Sydney, my dear," sobbed poor Mrs. Wynter, "you must not think of it! Oh, my dear, you will not say any thing more about it! You will wait till we see what happens, and then—if all goes well——"

“*Then* you would let me marry him?” she interrupted almost fiercely. “When all the danger is over—when I can be no help or comfort to him. Mother!” she cried, “if he is not to know that I love him till then, he never shall know it to the day I die!”

Into silence shrank timid Mrs. Wynter: Mr. Wynter sat perplexed: Sydney, standing between them with her flushed cheek and radiant eye, looked strong enough I thought to conquer both.

“I have asked too much, perhaps,” she said suddenly. “I said if he went I must go with him. I will pray for that afterwards, but I will ask less now. Only let me see him and speak to him—let me see him while he stays here—let me give what comfort I can to him. Oh, father!” she cried, clasping her hands—“I *must* see him—I *must* see him, or my heart will break!”

He looked sadly at her for a few moments, then silently stretched out his arms. With a sob she flung herself upon his neck.

“You shall see him,” he whispered quickly.

“If any one suffers it shall not be *you*—my darling—my darling!” he cried.

I had been sitting apart since Sydney had first spoken: it had been no business of mine to interfere with her; but now it seemed to me that my presence even as a spectator was scarcely longer desirable. I rose up, therefore, and, stealing away, closed the door.

But I had small intention of sleeping till I had seen her again. I went up-stairs, and entered her room, and, sitting by her window, waited there until she came. The vigil required of me was not a long one: ere half an hour was passed I heard her step upon the stairs. Helen and she came into the gallery together: in Helen’s room she lingered for a few minutes: then she came.

I rose up and met her as she entered.

“Are you here? I thought you had gone to bed.”

“I have been here since I left the drawing-room. Well, Sydney?”

She passed me and put down the light she carried on the table; she turned round with a strange look in her face.

"Oh, Honor, this has been dreadful!"

"I know it has, dear. But do not think of it now, Sydney. God bless you for a noble woman, my darling!" and I took her in my arms.

"Honor, go away for ten minutes. I want to speak to you—but go away first. I will call you."

I went, and waited in the school-room till she summoned me again. I knew very well what she had been doing without the sight, as I returned, of the fresh tears upon her cheek, or of the mark upon her bed where her bent head had rested.

"Sydney, if you are going to talk to me you will please to go to bed first. I have no ambition to be blamed at present for making you ill."

She was very obedient, and with my assistance a few minutes saw her ready for her couch. Once there she called to me.

"Come, now."

"Honor," she said, when I came, "put your arms about me. Be good and gentle to-night. Come nearer, and kiss me. Oh, Honor! they were all so kind down-stairs—I must be very wicked to feel it a relief to get away from them!"

“Probably you are—but if you did *not* feel it a relief just now, you must be somebody else, I think, than Sydney Wynter. Come, Sydney, don’t worry yourself with analyzing that feeling to-night. Make amends for it to-morrow, if you like ; but to-night leave it alone—you can’t help it.”

She put her arms round my neck, and pressed her face close to me. With shut eyes she lay so for several minutes.

“Honor, are you glad ?” she whispered softly at last.

“Infinitely glad, dear.”

“Are you ?” She opened her eyes, and looked up with a quick smile.

“I told them down-stairs,” she said timidly, after another moment or two ; “shall I tell you ?”

“What ?”

“Why I refused to marry him before. Do you know why it was ?”

“Not quite.”

“It was not because I did not care for him. I never was so happy in my life as during that first month or two that he was in Edinburgh. I knew



very soon that he cared for me," she said softly. "You know, Honor, we had not come together as if we were strangers. I do not think—no, it is more than *thinking*," she corrected herself, half bashfully, half proudly—"I *know* he had never forgotten me through all those years that I had not seen him. He told me that—poor fellow!"

"And you, Sydney?"

"I was only a child—you know I was so young," she said. "But oh, Honor!" she cried quickly, "I half broke my heart when he went away. Honor, I know you like him now—you see how noble and gentle and good he is: you can imagine something of what he must have been when he was a boy."

"I can imagine it, dear. Go back to Edinburgh now; you can talk to-morrow about his youthful perfections."

"It was about my poor Laura that we went all wrong," she said abruptly. "He was a friend of her husband's, and he saw more of what she was doing than I ever did—a great deal more than I ever would believe then that there *was* to be seen. And at last"—she stopped a moment, then went

on in a tone of pain—"at last he told her husband. Honor," she cried; "I have thought over all this till I have grown sick about it. Even yet I hardly know whether what he did was right—it brought such misery after it—it brought no good of any kind. I know now that he thought it was his duty to speak—but I was too wildly angry with him to believe even that then; I believed that it had been done out of ill-will to her—and I told him so. Oh, Honor! think—she had nobody but me to take her part: what else could I do when I believed that they were wronging her?"

"I do not suppose *you* could have done any thing else. But leave Mrs. Dalziel alone, Sydney; I will take all the rest of your doubts and miseries for granted."

"I think," she said with a sad smile, "that you would have been as stern with my poor Laura as William was—sterner, perhaps;—you have not much pity in you—less I think than he has."

"Go on with your story, Sydney. You know about as much of the pity in me, as of most other things."

"I cannot think what made him do it," she said slowly, after a short silence; "but he chose that time when I was angriest with him to ask me to marry him. It was one morning when he came to grandmamma's, before she had left her room, and no one saw him but I. Oh, Honor," she cried passionately, "I was very very miserable that day!"

"You refused him?"

"Oh, I refused him—I did a great deal worse than refuse him! I told him all I thought of what he had done—I told him that I never would forgive him for it. I was so unjust and cruel to him. How he went on caring for me after the things I said to him that day, I cannot—cannot think!"

"Why should he not? *You* went on caring for him after the things that you thought he had *done*—a far more severe trial of affection, I imagine."

"Do you think I went on caring for him?" she said, raising her eyes wistfully. "Ah, but I *said* I did not! I was so angry that I said it—and almost believed it for months. I did

every thing that I could think of to dislike him. I tried so hard ; I tried even ”—she stopped abruptly. “ Oh, Honor ! you will think me half a fool,” she cried ; “ but I can’t help it. I even tried when I saw that—that—that Mr. Leslie wanted to marry me, I tried all I could do to fall in love with him. Now, Honor, don’t—don’t, please !”—for I had broken into uncontrollable laughter.

“ You have been a wise woman, certainly, Sydney ! Well—go on : what folly next ? ”

“ That was the worst. But—I was getting very unhappy. I did not know what to do. When he spoke to me again ”—she looked up quickly ;—“ you know when that was ? ”

“ That night he sent me up to look after you, I suppose ? Well ? ”

“ I could scarcely say ‘ No ’ to him that night.”

“ So I suspected. You seemed to me in a very tender mood.”

“ Hush ! ” She paused for a moment or two. “ And then,” she said slowly—“ then at last the letter came ! Oh, Honor ! from that hour, in spite of all my wretchedness for her, there came such a

strange gladness into me. All the long struggle was at an end—all the weary weary trying not to care for him !”

I stooped low and kissed her—on forehead and cheek and lips. I loved that girl, Sydney Wynter, as I have not loved many women in my life.

“Honor”—and after a pause the fondling arms began to cling very close to me again—“I have something for you to do—will you do it ?”

“Probably—if you tell me what it is.”

“You must take my message to him. I *could* not tell him myself—I mean, I could not *speak* to him,” she said.

“I don’t think you could—poor child !”

“I would write—just one word or two—and you would bring me back his answer. Will you ?—is that right ?”—and she looked very hot and flushed.

“I never managed such a business before ; but, as far as my judgment goes, I should say it is right enough.”

“And you will go early ?—go, please, before any body else sees him. Will you, Honor ?”

“What do you call early? I can’t go and visit him in bed.”

“No—but—When, then?”

“I think I must announce my coming. I will go as early as you like, for that. I will go before breakfast, and say I wish to see him in a couple of hours. Does that please you?”

“But if in the mean time Uncle Gilbert goes?”

“I can prevent that. At any rate I can prevent his speaking about your matters if he does.”

“Can you? Well then that must do, I suppose”—and she turned her head from me with a sigh.

“Don’t be unreasonable, Sydney. Shut your eyes now, and go to sleep—that is infinitely the best thing you can do.”

“Ah! you are tired—you want to go,” she said gently.

“Nothing of the sort. Nor am I going; I shall stay here till you are asleep. Now, like a good child, shut your eyes.”

“Honor—one word.” She looked up sadly in my face. “We have said nothing of all this sorrow to-day.”

“And we *will* say nothing, dear.”

“Are you angry with him ?”—timidly.

“*I* do not judge him, Sydney.”

“Oh, Honor, the fault was not his !”

“Hush !”

“He could not help it.”

“I do not say he could.”

“If he has been to blame, he is suffering bitterly now for it.”

“Unquestionably he is.”

“Honor, he has been so good ; you don't know half how good he has been all his life.”

Well, he *had* been good, I suppose—good, as men go ; better than many men. I do not say that he was among the best—though, even with respect to that, God knows !

Her eyes were closed at last, and her head laid upon its pillow ; but she was hard to silence to-night. When I thought she was half asleep, suddenly, as wide awake as ever, the face was turned to me.

“Now, what are you doing ?”

“I want you to kiss me.”

"Will you please, the next time you have such an irrational desire, to hold your tongue about it?"

"I don't know ; come here."

"Honor"—gravely, when she had got me, and had fixed her dark eyes, as she did at once, full upon mine—"do you know a thought I once had about you?"

"Very likely I do. What was it?"

"I don't think you do. When I came home, and saw how beautiful you were, I thought—I thought it would end in William Rupert's marrying you."

"That was the notion in your head, was it? And no doubt, having renounced him yourself, you were very happy at such a prospect of getting him well off your hands?"

"Hold your tongue! Now, wait a moment; you are not to go. Honor, would you have married him?"

"No."

"You would not?"

"Amazing as it seems—no."

"Never?"



"Never is a wide word, Sydney. I would not now."

"Not if he loved you?"

"Not if he loved me with every fibre of his heart!"

"Go away!" and she loosened her hands from me. "I want to go to sleep."

I went away with a laugh, and sat quietly in the chair by her bedside. Neither she nor I spoke more. When I rose to leave her, the light I brought near showed me a calm smile as she slept.

Peace be to her slumbers—pleasant be her dreams! She was younger than I by two years. She was nearer—now, and at all times—to heaven—by how great degree of measurement, God knows!

## CHAPTER II.

## UNION.

MOIST on the ground, and fair overhead, a morning fresh, bright, and pleasant. Full, abundant summer reigning round me ; perfumes rolling up from earth and shrub ; songs and whisperings in the air ; a morning full of gorgeous colours, sun-lighted through rising mist.

My walk was accomplished—my message given. As I trod again upon my homeward way, a voice behind me called my name ; at that call I turned. Footsteps came near ; near came stalwart figure and lion head ; without the civility of a salutation Mr. Kingsley stood before me, and commenced this catechism—

“ Why are you not in bed ? ”

“ What should I be in bed at this hour for ? ”

“What were you doing at the cottage?”

“How do you know I was there?”

“I saw you. What were you doing there?”

“You must have been lying hid amongst the bushes, then. Where were you, Mr. Kingsley?”

“What did you go for? Did you hear how he was?”

“Yes; fast asleep.”

“You were very anxious about him this morning that you came so early!”

“Not more anxious than usual. By the way, I wanted to speak to you. Will you keep Mr. Wynter away from him, and keep away yourself, this morning?”

“You are going to send Sydney?”

“Probably.”

“That was what you went just now to say?”

“To tell him through an old deaf gardener that Sydney was coming? Is that how *you* would have broken the news, Mr. Kingsley?”

“Perhaps it might have been. I am no adept at managing love matters.”

“Nor I.”

"Yet it suits you"—speculatively—"this sort of work?"

"That is exactly what I am trying. I cannot tell yet."

"You have had no practice in it before?"

"No—in such matter I never before helped man or woman."

"How do you know what to do, then? Where does your knowledge come from?"

"Knowledge is not necessary; nothing is necessary but common-sense and a little sympathy."

We had been standing still since we met. I had planted myself against the trunk of a tree, and, leaning there, was tolerably comfortable.

"A little sympathy," he repeated slowly. "Is this gathering of sympathy, Miss Haig, from some one else—this enlisting of the emotions of another woman—a necessary business to be gone through when women fall in love?"

"In some cases, I believe, very necessary. Not in Sydney's."

"What is the use of it?"

"It is taken as a sort of medicine, I think. The

falling in love would not go on properly without it. It would get weak and sickly—perish, perhaps, at last altogether—so, at least, I understand.”

“It is a good thing, then?”

“Excellent, no doubt, for weak constitutions.”

“The strong, perhaps, may let it alone?”

“The strong, I think, had *better* let it alone.”

He gave a quiet laugh.

“Miss Haig, if you were a bird at this moment, all your feathers would be standing perpendicular. I think your hair is rising as it is.”

“If you think so, I will walk quietly home, and let it return to its natural level;” and I roused myself from my leaning posture.

He took his place at my side.

“Mr. Kingsley, are you going this way out of civility to me?”

“Do you desire that we should walk home by different paths?”

“I beg your pardon—I did not know you *were* going home. I thought you were going to Mr. Rupert.”

“You told me not to go.”

"You may go now, or any time for the next two hours, if you like—so that you keep silent about Sydney."

"You said he was asleep—I will go presently."

We walked on side by side. We dropped into silence. There had been a pause between us of several minutes when he told me this :

"I was at Leslie's just now," he said. "They are to attempt the amputation to-day."

I looked up, and saw the expression on his face. Its meaning could be read easily. *I* read it, and grew chill at heart.

"You had better not tell Sydney," he said quietly. "I shall tell no one else except my brother."

A moment afterwards, he looked down to me, and—

"I tell *you*, little Honor," he said gently, "because in this business you have a right to know all that I know."

"Mr. Kingsley, he may die at once—while the operation goes on—may he not?"

"It is very likely."

“And if he gets through it, he may still not be safe for days to come?”

“I believe not.”

“We *must* not tell Sydney then, certainly. She is very strong—stronger than you believe, but these next few days must be clouded as little as possible to her.”

“I think so.”

Presently he turned to me—an expression of odd curiosity in his eyes.

“How is she?” he asked abruptly. “Is she very happy?”

“She is happy, I think: she loves him, I am very sure.”

“And she will go with him, I suppose—whatever happens?”

“That I am certain of!”

“Little friend”—after a pause—“you are not like most women in some things; are you like them—like Sydney and others—in this? Have *you* got a love of self-sacrifice in you, too?”

“I cannot take my character to pieces, Mr. Kingsley.”

"Is it because you think that thing is not there? Look up a moment."

I did look up, yielding to an instant's impulse; with kindled eye, with coloured cheek; so—as he had bidden me.

His glance took in my aspect: smiling quietly, he surveyed me.

"So angry—Honor?"

He bent to me and touched my hand. Stooping near me, I saw within his eyes what, if there had been pain or anger for a moment in my heart, swept them away.

"No, I am not angry."

"Not now, but you *were*. You were proud and hurt. Little woman," he cried, "with your cold ways and your passionate nature!"

He lifted my hand and grasped it in his a moment. I took it from him quietly—it was best so. Read as he might beyond them, my "cold ways" were still a shield to me—nay, more than a shield, sometimes a defence strong as a coat-of-mail.

"I heard all Sydney's love-story last night," I



said, and as we walked I told it him till we drew near the house.

“Now home with you, and I will go back and learn how he is. When are you to see him?”

“I said I would come at eleven.”

“I will have him ready for you. Go in to your breakfast: they are not to wait for me.”

I was punctual to my time: at eleven o'clock I was again at the cottage door, and in a few moments more within the small parlour, where, leaning upon pillows on the sofa, gaunt and pale, I found Mr. Rupert.

“Mr. Kingsley said you would come. This is kind of you—this is kind of you!” he exclaimed eagerly.

I went to his side and spoke to him—not certainly without gladness on my part—for a few minutes: then I sat down by him, and began to close my fingers round Sydney's note.

It was little my habit to beat round the bush when I had a thing to do: when my greeting was made, I began to speak of my business at once.

“I came this morning because I had a message

for you," I said ; "because I was commissioned to give a letter to you."

"To me?" He looked up, half interested.

"To you—from Sydney."

He did not speak: one flash his lighted eyes gave me: without another word I drew the letter forth: a moment, and it was within his hand, torn from me, held fast.

I rose up and went to the open window. There were a rose-tree and a honeysuckle growing linked together there. I stood, plucking leaves and petals from them, and throwing them out upon the air—an idle occupation.

"Miss Haig!"

I turned round and went back. The sun dazzled me for a moment: there was a brightness between him and me that kept the sight of him from me; only when I resumed the place that I had risen from at his side, could I see the change that had come to him—the colour on pallid cheek and lip, the light within the keen, triumphant eye. Beautiful, frank, proud face!

I sat down, and by one mutual impulse our

hands met and clasped. I was glad—I was very glad. God bless him! high nature, and warm noble heart!

A moment's silence; then he looked up to me.

“She has told you this?”

“She told me all last night. Mr. Rupert, I will not *say* I am glad; you know I am.”

“I know it; kind little friend, who took my part bravely from the first.”

He took his pocket-book and tore a leaf from it. Upon that leaf he wrote one line and folded it up. He held it out to me.

“Honor Haig, take it quickly! I have known you be a swift messenger.”

“I will be swift now—swift as feet can make me.”

He lifted my hand again and wrung it; before he let it fall he put it to his lips.

“God bless you—Honor!”

And I took my missive and went.

A third time I stood at that cottage door, with Sydney's feverish hand in mine.

“Are you ready?” I asked her.

There turned an appealing face to me, trembling and white.

“You are not to leave me!”

“Don’t be a simpleton, Sydney!”

“Honor, you are *not!*” and she closed her fingers round my wrist with a grasp that left its mark there.

I went forward and knocked at the parlour door : I opened it and brought her in ; I brought her mid-way through the room, then freed my hand and left her.

A cry fell on my ear.

“Sydney!”

She raised her wild bright eyes one instant full towards where he lay ; then softly she answered “Yes!” and went to him. She knelt down by his side.

“Has my true one come at last?” he said.

He took her hands and drew them to his breast. I saw her face one moment as she stooped—then lip, cheek, brow were hidden. The sound of one low sob rose through the room—then all was

hushed. The new arm had closed over her ; near it held her, firm it kept her.

I went away gently through the door that I had left open, and closed it after me.

## CHAPTER III.

## DEPARTURE.

SHE was to go. Opposition was over—sad consent was given : a fortnight was to see her married to him and away. They were to go to Switzerland. There they would remain until conclusive tidings of Mr. Leslie could be sent them.

With respect to him the wrestle still continued between life and death, but he had survived the amputation, and there was at least room for hope. To that hope we clung with infinite, unutterable yearning.

In a week Mr. Rupert was well enough to leave the cottage. The marriage was to take place in London, and thither, by one of the night trains, and attended by Mr. Kingsley, he went.

One by one, the day that he departed, we stole

to the cottage to take our leave of him. Last of them all except Mr. Wynter, by her own wish, Sydney and I went.

It was after sunset, twilight advancing—and all was ready for their going.

“You may have a quarter of an hour,” Mr. Kingsley told them—and he coolly took me by the arm and brought me out from them.

“They don’t want you : stay here.”

“Mr. Kingsley, this is not kind. I came to say good-bye to him.”

“You *shall* say good-bye to him.”

“Yes—good-bye—and nothing more. And God knows when I may see him again !”

“Do you want to go back to them ?”

“I cannot now : you have turned me out.”

“Then sit down quietly.”

“I will not : I have been sitting down all day.”

“Honor—what do you want ?”

“Nothing.”

“I will only give them ten minutes.”

I made no answer. I walked up and down the small piece of path before the cottage : he sat him-

self down on a turf seat by the cottage door : neither of us for a considerable time spoke again. He rose up at last ; he came towards me.

“ Is it time yet ? ”

“ *You* are keeping count of that, I suppose.”

“ We will give them three minutes more. Will that suit you—little tyrant ? ”

“ It is not my concern : give them what you promised them.”

I continued my walk—he put himself at my side ; we paced on together in silence.

Suddenly he turned to me.

“ *I* wanted to say good-bye to little Honor, too : has she no parting word for me ? ”

“ Mr. Kingsley, *you* are coming back.”

I raised my eyes an instant—one moment’s quick, sharp fear impelled my answer.

“ Should you be sorry if I did not ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ For an hour—for a day, perhaps ? Then—you would forget ? ”

“ Since you know me so well, there is no need to discuss the matter.”



"I do not know ! little Honor, I do not know !

I stood abruptly still : there was a sound of footsteps coming towards us. I turned to Mr. Kingsley impatiently.

"Go and call them ; that is Mr. Wynter."

"They have had their time," he said in an altered tone. "Go you to them : I will stay with my brother."

That was best, perhaps. I went into the cottage and joined them.

They made me welcome ; they were cordial and kind to me.

"We shall talk of Honor whenever we talk of home," he said. "We shall wish sometimes when we sit together that Honor's bright face could come beside us."

"No—you will not wish that, I think ; but speak of me sometimes, and, when you come back, be glad to see me."

"Will that content you ?"

"That will content me."

We were grave enough, for there lay a cloud over him now that even Sydney's love could not

do more than partly lift ; and on that fair brow, and in those once sunlighted eyes, there sat a mark of care and sorrow, at the sight of which my heart had ached through the last week.

Our short time sped : the summons came for him.

He came to me and held my two hands fast.

“ God bless you !—God be with you ! ”

He took Sydney in his arms before me, and kissed her again and again. I went away from them towards the door. She came to me in a moment or two afterwards, very white and still, and put her hand within my arm. Then we joined the others.

All was ready : the chaise waiting in the road ; Mr. Wynter active and impatient. He hurried them to their places : a few moments more, and they were gone—both of them—the carriage wheels rolling off into the distance.

We took our walk homewards quietly. I resigned Sydney to her father's care, and followed a step or two behind. The evening was grey and misty—a feeble, sickly twilight round us : even

that had almost ceased to glimmer when we reached the house.

That night was past. Next morning Mrs. Wynter met me on the stairs with an excited exclamation, her simple face, as she made it, full of infinite and shocked perplexity.

“My dear,” she cried, “what *do* you think?”

She took possession of me, and carried me to her room: she shut the door, and seated me beside her with an air of mystery: she folded her little white hands upon her knees; she raised her grave face and looked earnestly on me.

“My dear, Miss Rupert says she means to go to him!”

“To her brother?”

“No—no: to Mr. Leslie!” and there came a look of absolute horror into the raised round eyes.

“I wonder she has not gone before.”

“My dear!”

“I thought she would have gone at once. I fully expected that she would have left us as soon as she heard of his danger. Most women would, I think.”

“After he had treated her so? Oh, my dear!”

“Perhaps she can forget that now.”

“But I never imagined that she cared for him still! Nobody in the world could have thought it. I always thought she would have gone thousands of miles to get away from him. When she came just now, and told me she meant to go to him—my dear, you might have knocked me down!”

Simple Mrs. Wynter! Kind, good, innocent little woman! Not very large was the circle that embraced *her* intentions: not very wide the space over which *her* vision ranged.

Miss Rupert fulfilled her intention. That same afternoon, in the cold, silent, direct way in which she did all things, she took her departure from Riverston. So quietly she went, that it was only by chance that I even saw her. She had already left the house—she was advancing towards the avenue, when, from a part of the garden where I was, I perceived her. A sudden impulse, that made me for a moment think of her not as Mrs. Hammond, but as William Rupert's sister, sent me quickly towards her: I gained on her—I came to her side—I spoke to her, and put out my hand.

“You will not be the worse even for *my* wishing you ‘God speed!’”

She stood still and turned. I had scarcely seen her—I had not once spoken to her since that ill-omened morning in the garden; I was not prepared for the change I now found in her—for the life—sad and grave as its expression was—that had come and stirred those marble features. Handsome I had always thought her; but, as she stood before me, I saw now for the first time her brother’s face shining through hers.

“No—I shall not be the worse,” she said slowly.

She took my hand; as I felt her clasp close over it, a regretful feeling rose across me of partial wrong done to her.

“If I had known who you were,” I said abruptly, urged by this emotion, “we might have been better friends. I take the blame upon myself.”

“You do not deserve blame,” she said calmly. “I did not want to make friends.”

A sad, lonely woman! With a chill creeping

over me, I began to loosen my hold from her ; suddenly she tightened hers.

“My brother liked you,” she said abruptly, “and you tried to serve him,” and she stooped down, and, to my infinite amazement, put her lips to my cheek.

“I would try to serve his sister now if there was any thing I could do for her.”

“Thank you ! there is not any thing.”

“Miss Rupert, I hope some happiness may come to you yet. Clouds do not often overspread a *whole* lifetime.”

She looked into my face, and a feeble flush coloured her cheek.

“It is best not to hope,” she said ; “then there comes no deceiving.”

She let go my hand. Thus we parted. She went on her way, and from that day to this I have never seen her face again.

Yet one visit more she paid to Riverston, a month afterwards—when we knew that Mr. Leslie’s danger was over—for he did not die ; but that day I did not see her. She came, and quietly, to Mrs.

Wynter alone, drew off her glove, and showed a ring upon her marriage finger.

"And, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Wynter as she told me, "she is really married to him! And, she looks—as I never thought I should see that poor white face look—not glad exactly, but so at peace, so calm, and beautiful. I never thought before that she was like William's sister."

She had gone and linked her lot to him! A busy successor had come to her place at Riverston; in room, or hall, or garden, Mr. Leslie's voice and step sounded no more; both had departed; the door had closed on them.

Like a strange remembered dream, the thought of those two, with their grave stained history, comes back to me now. Nothing of their present life—nothing of its lights and shadows—do I know. His shattered constitution—his broken temper—these I have heard of. Whether, in his self-inflicted banishment—for they went abroad—other changes besides these have come to him—such changes as, feeble and irritable as he is, may still enable the life of the faithful woman who clings to

him to be not altogether a sad one, I do not know. She writes home seldom, and, reserved as ever, her letters tell us little. From our daily life they two have passed—like the breath from a pane of glass.



## CHAPTER IV.

## FAREWELL

It was Sydney's last night at Riverston. The day was departed, sunset had passed, twilight had drawn in and deepened, fire-light and lamp-light gleamed for the last time that she should see them on gilded frames and crimson curtains.

We sat together that night—a quiet company—talking as those talk who, each to each as they are now, will never meet again. It was the first such parting I had ever known—the first time I had ever sat amidst a household of whom one was on the eve of going forth for ever.

The fire-light glistened more than once on Sydney's wet eyes, but there were smiles amongst us as well as tears—words of hope and gladness as well as of sorrow. Quiet and solemn, calm and

sweet, those last hours passed—hours uneventful, yet coloured by a hue unlike all hours before.

While the night was still young, I rose from my place, and left them to spend the last moments of those twenty years alone.

Up to my room I went, and presently to my bed. There, an hour afterwards, as I lay, not yet fallen asleep, Sydney's soft hand came to my door, and the familiar figure—to be seen after this night no more—crept silently to my bedside.

“Are you awake still?”

“Wide awake.”

She knelt down and stretched out her arms about me; she put her head upon my pillow without a word, and wearily closed her eyes.

“Are you so tired, my darling?”

She hid her face, and suddenly sobbed aloud—

“I am so tired of all this pain!”

“All this pain will be over soon—for *you*, Sydney.”

“Yes—for *me*! that is part of the bitterness of it.”

“That part of the bitterness you must bear

patiently ; it will be the drop of gall in your full cup of joy."

I turned her face and kissed her—a face so wet with tears, so weary and pale in the white moonlight.

"You must not stay with me, my dear one."

"No—I am going."

She raised herself a little, and put back the curtain. She looked straight into my eyes.

"Honor, I shall never see you lying here again!"

"You cannot tell that Sydney ; God knows !"

"I cannot tell—but I think it. My bonnie face ! my bonnie face !" she cried. "Oh, Honor—keep it fair and young till I come again ; keep sorrow away from it—it is too beautiful to get shadowed and lined like other faces ! I wish—oh, I wish I could take it with me !"

"Do not wish that, Sydney. *One* face is all you need, and that one you will have. Without the sight of *some* faces it is hard and bitter at times for women to live, but I have not often found that they are the faces of other women."

There was sudden silence ; she let the curtain fall.

“ Sydney, come to me, now.”

She bent to me, and I wrapped my arms about her.

“ You have been a comfort and a blessing to me ; you have made my heart glad and warm with your love. Blessings on you for all you have done—my darling ! ”

“ Honor, remember me ! Don’t let another woman take my place ! ”

“ I will not ; you are safe lodged. Now, Sydney—go.”

“ Must I go ? My beautiful ! ” she suddenly murmured—“ my darling—my darling ! ”

“ Sydney, what have I ever done to make you care for me like this ? ”

Quick came her answer.

“ You have been something to me,” she cried, “ that no one else ever was ! You came upon me like a spring day ; with your energy, and your life, and your beauty, you have made every thing you have ever touched fresh and dear to me. Honor, I love you ! ” she cried.

“I take your love; take you mine, Sydney,” and I kissed her on her lips. “And now, again—go.”

“I am going. Honor, God bless you!”

“And God bless Sydney—and bring her back to Riverston with the same heart she takes with her now!”

Thus, that night we parted; and it was in truth our real farewell. The few last hurried hours that the morning gave us, afforded no time for lingering talk. They were to set off early, and not until the carriage had driven to the door was every final preparation finished.

Silently, at last, we gathered to see her go. On the same steps where, four months ago, her mother had given her her first welcome home, I held her for the last time in my arms. Quietly, with scarcely either words or tears, she went; the wan face, bravely flashing out one faint sudden smile, was the last look I had of her.

Reader, you will see and hear of this Sydney Wynter no more. Bid her farewell! She was not much of a heroine. She was not perfect by any means; she was not beautiful at all, nor per-

haps very good; but true-hearted, loving, noble, in her inmost nature I had found her—and true-hearted, loving, and noble, if I have done her justice, she should appear to you.

## CHAPTER V.

## A GERMAN DICTIONARY.

I SAT in the breakfast-room reading German. It was the close of the week—Saturday, a day on which, when the sun shone, Effie seldom failed to make claim to a half holiday, and such claim had been made and granted to-day.

We had been having luncheon, but those who had gathered to that meal were again dispersed, and the room boasted only two remaining occupants, Mr. Kingsley and myself. He sat at the end of the room writing in the large window; I, at the centre table, read my German.

Mr. Kingsley had been almost a fortnight away from Riverston; he had returned only yesterday. Since then he and I had held small communication together. He had come back in a mood of gloom

and silence, depressed and weary-looking, distant and cold. He had met me with a chill touch of the hand, he had responded to my remarks with monosyllables: he sat now at the furthest distance possible from me, his chair turned so that he could not see me, his thoughts doubtless too gravely occupied to take cognizance of my presence.

My temper and Mr. Kingsley's had, perhaps fortunately, not many points of resemblance. My failings were not his, nor his mine: what put him out of humour had small effect on me: what depressed him often, on the contrary, gave me elation. His aspect now spoke lack of spirits: silent, palid, sad he sat. I was neither pale nor sorrowful; silent I was, but silent from compulsion; out of spirits I decidedly was not.

I read my German. I was not reading to-day for pleasure. The book I had chosen was dry and difficult; it dealt in polysyllables manifold, in words of strange composition, in idiom and involved phrase. I had set myself a task, and with some difficulty was getting through it.

Working diligently, I came presently upon a



sentence hard to construe ; long I pored over it, but still its meaning baffled me ; I lost my patience over it finally, and, rising, I took my book to where Mr. Kingsley sat.

He was writing energetically. Standing behind his chair, I waited a convenient moment ; then dexterously I slid my volume between his uplifted pen and paper. I opened my lips and spoke.

“I have got out of patience with this sentence : will you tell me how it goes ? ”

He took the book, he read the passage, he put it into English : that done the volume was, in silence, returned to me. I had looked for no more : with demure thanks I took it back, and retreated from his sight.

He sat facing the large window. Half behind him, half to the side of him, its back to the light, stood a small low rocking-chair. I did not return to the table, but I took possession of this.

We sat in perfect silence. Assiduously he wrote : patiently I read. Ten minutes passed over us. I wanted my dictionary, but I had left it behind me on the table : I had no desire to rise

for it: instead of rising, I leaned back in my chair.

“*Abhobeln*, Mr. Kingsley?”

“To plane.”

“Ah, to be sure! And *verasten*?”

“To ramify.”

That system suited me! I put my feet upon a footstool, I laid my book upon my knees, I folded my arms and read luxuriously.

A short pause.

“*Nachtgleiche*?”

“Equinox. Have you no dictionary?”

“It is on the table. *Verwegenheit*?”

“I don’t know.”

“It means some kind of ill-temper, does it not?”

“I don’t know.”

Silence for about two minutes.

“*Mehrdeutig*?”

He rose abruptly up: glancing across the room, he marched forward and seized my dictionary; he brought it to my chair, and held it forth to me.

“Thank you, put it down.”

“If I put it down you cannot reach it.”

“I don’t want to reach it: put it back upon the table.”

He stood before me, surveying me suspiciously from under his dark lashes.

“You prefer to read German, that you don’t understand, without a dictionary!” he said sarcastically.

“Certainly, very much when I can do it.”

He drew the book towards him with a grimace that I thought strove to conceal a half smile. He sat down again to his desk, and set the book before him.

“What word did you ask for?”

“*Mehrdeutig.*”

“Amphibolous.”

“I don’t know what that means in English.”

“Tossed about—tossed from one to another.”

“Then you must look at this sentence again, for it will not go right.”

He bent back resignedly to take the book; leaning towards me over his chair—

"I thought you knew German?" he said.

"Yes—but this book is so hard."

"Why do you read it, then?"

"Because when I have begun a thing I seldom give it up."

A moment's pause.

"Whatever it may be?"—and the drooped eyes flashed suddenly up on me.

"Whatever it may be."

"What, you never grow wearied? You never stop short with the thought that the game is not worth the trouble of playing it?"

I heard the keen, sudden, bitterness of his tone: he was watching me, too. I was aware of that, but I answered without altering accent or look:—"Very seldom: I generally calculate the trouble before I begin."

There was no response from him: he sat slowly turning over the leaves of my book: I looked up after a few moments.

"Will you tell me that sentence?"

"I thought you had been going out?" abruptly.

“So I was.”

“Why do you not go, then?”

“I shall go presently, but I am comfortable here—more comfortable than I should be perhaps if I went.”

“You would be in the midst of the sunshine and the green trees: here you can neither see one nor the other.”

“Mr. Kingsley, there are more things desirable in life than sunshine and green trees.”

He turned round, and laid the book down upon his desk. There was some moments' silence.

“Can you not do it?”

“Presently.”

“I am glad it gives you trouble.”

“Are you?” There came a half smile.

“Yes, it is pleasant to find that it puzzles you.”

“Look here.”

He rose up and brought the book round to me: stooping over my chair, he read the passage slowly aloud; he disentangled its intricacies; he spread it out before me, clear, intelligible.

“Do you see?”

“ Yes.”

I put out my hand to take the volume ; but, as if he did not see my offer, he held it still.

“ Do you mean to read through all these two hundred pages ? ”

“ I mean to try.”

“ Do you want help ? ”

“ When I can get it.”

“ Will you have it now ? ”

“ Yes.”

He drew a chair forward, and sat down by my side.

“ Read.”

I took the book and read.

“ Put back your hair.”

This command came at the close of the first paragraph. A curl or two as I stooped had fallen between him and the page.

“ I beg your pardon.”

I put the curls as well as I could behind my ear, and held them back with my hand. I resumed my reading, and went on to the foot of the page.

“ Now, translate.”

Obediently I commenced—but I had not sat performing a lesson by a master's side since I had been a girl of fifteen, and suddenly the remembrance of that old self came over me ; dwelling on that vanished image my thoughts left the present ; I mistranslated, I grew confused.

“What are you doing ?”

His sharpened voice recalled me to myself.

“I will begin again.”

“What were you thinking of ?”

“I was thinking of my old German lessons—and my old German master—when I was a girl at school, seven years ago.”

“You look very like a school girl now, with your hair put so behind your ears.”

“I wonder how I *did* look when I was a school-girl !”

“Do you not remember ?”

“Not very clearly. We used to sleep six in a room, and there was only one looking-glass amongst us. But I knew myself a good deal by my dresses in those days. There was one blue dress in particular with short sleeves that suited me especially.”

“How do you know that?”

“I guessed it, Mr. Kingsley. I used to wear that dress when I wanted to look well. I wore it often at my German lessons.”

“Why?”

“Because I liked them—and I liked my master.”

“And he, you?”

“Yes—he liked me. He was an old man; he was very kind and good to me. I studied very hard to please him.”

“And you did please him?”

“Yes.”

A short pause.

“You were very vain in those days? You knew already that you were handsome?”

“No—I was not vain.”

“You thought yourself like your other school-fellows, perhaps? You saw no difference between them and you?”

“You are quite wrong, Mr. Kingsley; I saw a very considerable difference.”

“In your own favour?”

“Exactly; for the most part in my own favour.”



“Miss Haig,” coldly and curiously, after a moment, “you care a great deal, I have always noticed, for good looks ; what would you do if by some sudden accident you lost your own ?”

“What should I do ?” and I spoke with quick energy. “I should grieve—bitterly—bitterly !”

He looked up ; sudden, accent and look changed ; he answered me with tender kindness ; soft pity beamed on me from his raised eyes. Stirred alike by that voice and that look, I went on quickly.

“I should grieve—but you would not know it ; the pain would not show, the bleeding would be inward ; I think I should not be humble enough to let it show.”

“You would be wrong, then,” slowly.

“Yes ! I should be wrong—that I know. I should be wrong in many things—wrong, perhaps, even in feeling the pain—yet I *should* feel it.”

“You like then so much to be beautiful ?”

“I like to be beautiful in the sight of those I love ; it would grieve me unutterably if I were not. For years and years I have felt that.”

"Since you used to put [on the blue frock for your German master?"

"Yes."

He had drawn the small table on which he had been writing to his side; he had leant his elbow on it, and was shading his eyes with his raised hand. Firm, square, massive, above that hand, I saw the outline of his brow, rising a little, noble and broad, before the dark locks hid it. From the eyes upwards, that face and head were picturesque and striking. I had always found them so; less I did not now think them. He was dusky and grim; he was spare and fleshless—wide nostrilled and wide mouthed—but it was the face and head of a Titan.

He put his hand suddenly back from his eyes; he turned his head and looked me in the face.

"That old master was worth dressing for," he said abruptly; "you cared to look well in his eyes; for this one—you would not put on a ribbon, Honor!"

"How do you know that, Mr. Kingsley?"

"Nay—I think it. Am I not right?"

“You want me to expose myself to a new charge of vanity. Let me go on with my German.”

I put out my hand, but he held the book away from me.

“Little Honor !”

“Do you know,” half-jesting, “I put on a white dress yesterday, when you were coming home ?”

“Not for *me* ?”

“It need not have been for you, certainly ; for when you came you were surly, and would scarcely speak to me—and as for my white gown, I don’t believe you ever noticed it at all.”

“I noticed it ; I knew you had it on.”

“I could not tell that. You scarcely opened your lips to me.”

“Did that vex you ?”

“Yes, it vexed me—it pained me ; I do not like to be met coldly.”

“I did not mean to pain you ; God knows, I did not think you would have felt it ! Will you forgive me ?”

“Why did you show me that coldness? What have I done?”

“Will you only forgive me if I tell you that?”

“I did not say so.”

“Then, little Honor, be generous. Give me your hand here into mine; say, ‘I forgive you!’”

“But still, I want to know my own offence. What was it?”

“You did nothing,” quickly; “no one did wrong but I.”

“What was it *you* did, then?”

I was questioning him half in jest; on the sudden I was conscious of a change in his aspect; he drew back, his brow contracted.

“Why are you so cruel? You are like a child,” he exclaimed, “playing at putting your fingers in an open wound. Do you *make* me tell you every thing?” and his eyes flashed sudden on my face. “I thought, then, that you were tired of me!” he cried. “I thought you were weary of pretending friendship for me! I thought that the more bitter my self-derision was for having allowed myself to

be deceived—the clearer it showed its fruits—so much the better for me, now!”

“What *made* you think all this, Mr. Kingsley? You had no cause—you had no right?”

“I thought it,” he cried, “because a disappointed life has made me swift in self-torture! To me it is easier to doubt than to believe, far easier to fall into the Slough of Despond than to keep Hope fast griped even though I once hold her.”

“I do not think you ever try to gripe her,” I said quietly; “the first time she trembles in your fingers, it seems to me that you let her go.”

“Because I am afraid of her treachery! I told you that once before. Honor, she fled from me once, leaving in her place the aspect of the Angel of Death. I have feared her since! For sixteen years I have scarcely ever looked in her face.”

“You would have been happier if you had. A life without Hope is a life without Faith: you cannot lose the one without losing the other.”

“Honor,” after a few moments, “was I wrong in what I thought?”

“You were wrong.”

“Will you forgive me for it?”

He extended his hand; within its open palm I laid my own. His fingers closed and held me; a firm, warm clasp he gave me. Well I knew that close, strong grasp—well I liked it; with kindly greeting such as he gave me now, often had his hand before blessed me.

“Little Honor,” he said, “how long could you bear with me?”

I shook my head.

“I do not know.”

“Not long, I think. Perhaps not again? You are haughty and hot by nature: your pride would not bear much.”

“Of my pride you know nothing, Mr. Kingsley.”

“I know what sort it is. Have I lived in this house with you all these weeks, and do you think I have seen nothing of you? I know about your pride. Fierce, wrathful, swift for war it is; it can hide itself; the talons can curl in under the velvet paw; it can shake you too from head to foot; rapid, fiery, it can possess you like a demon.”

“That it can *not* do!—that it never has done yet! Those possessed of by demons lose power of self-government; such loss have I never sustained.”

“But you are fierce—you are unsubduable—you are no more to be touched in such moods than fire is to be touched. A pattern of Christian virtues, Honor, you are not. What you are”—and, with a moment's pause, there came to his voice a tone that touched me quickly—“I often do not clearly know. You have belief in holy things, you walk upon no crooked paths, and yet the natural essence of your nature seems to me Pagan more than Christian. Little Honor, why are you so proud and fierce, so barren in humility?”

Ay—why was I? Had I never put those questions to myself? Had I never asked the meaning of this fierce, rebel, stubborn nature—Pagan, as he called it—that had been given me?—asked what I was to do with it—how I was to mould and turn it? In long wakeful nights, in hours of solitude, in hours of bodily and mental unrest and pain, I had asked these questions; painfully, patiently,

humbly I had craved response ; despondently had I known a hundred times that answer for me there was none. Yet once or twice, at intervals, rare, precious, the heavens *had* opened : after long silence had come a voice ; from heights where eyes of mine could not pierce, where blaze of light shut out my presence, words had descended ; into my soul had poured a balm ;—at my call, vexed, weary, feeble, faint with a battle long prolonged, a struggle never ceasing, yet tending to no victory ; at length an angel had come down, bidding dissension cease, calming, reconciling, shedding light and peace unutterable over senses dimmed with warfare and doubt. In the light of that peace had I slept and wakened ; soothed by a conviction new and sweet, comforted by a hope born fresh out of long strife and darkness, days had even thus stretched out a calm duration over me.

Then—what had followed ? Alas, it needs no telling ! Reader, picture it for yourself : picture the gathering darkness when clouds rush back heavy to the west at twilight, till the azure and the crimson and the gold are hid.



“I cannot help my nature,” I said aloud. “I must take it as God has given it me. They say that these natures of ours are to be treated as plots of earth—are to be ploughed and tilled, sowed and watered. But when the earth is broken up by rocks—not loose stones, but stubborn rock, bedded in its foundations—how can plough or harrow go over that?”

“The rock may be broken. Have patience: have faith.”

“What kind of faith? I *have* faith that God will help those who help themselves; but that he will work a miracle upon me in these days—that for the evil in me, while I sit passively praying, he will put in good, for that I have no belief—no faith—none utterly.”

We ceased to speak: I sat quiet by his side for several minutes; but in that silence a question rose within me, and at length I asked it.

“Mr. Kingsley, do I jar upon you? Being what I am, do I offend you?”

There came a flush to his cheek, a light to his eye: swift and clear-toned he spoke this answer—

“In word, or act, or thought,” he said, “*never!*”

I was contented, I was happy ; I said no more. Quietly I took up the book, so long lying idle on my knee, and began—for as we talked it had fallen shut—to find my place in it again.

He put forth his hand and took it from me.

“You are not going on with this? You have had enough German for to-day.”

“There are two pages more ; they are part of my day’s work : I want to do them.”

“Come, then—translate.”

He pointed to the place ; I recommenced forthwith, nor paused till my work was done. I translated carefully, to the best of my ability : with not more than two or three reproofs I got my lesson ended.

“And now?”

“Now I must go and see after that wild puss of mine. By the bye, I have been making a likeness of her since you went. It is not bad. Should you like to see it?”

“Yes, show it to me.”

“I must go for my portfolio, then.”

“Sit still: I will fetch it for you.”

He rose up to do my errand; before he reached the door it was opened; on the threshold I saw Mrs. Wynter.

“Oh, Gilbert! I was looking for you,” she said.

She held two letters in her hand.

“Thomas has just come from town, and he called at the post-office and got these. This is for you; they are both from Ursula—and what do you think she says?” Mrs. Wynter’s eyes grew round with wonder. “She says she is coming here!”

I could not see Mr. Kingsley’s face at this announcement; what effect it produced upon him, the half-suppressed exclamation that broke from his lips only imperfectly told me. He took his letter quickly without a syllable, and tore it open. Without moving from his place, he stood and read it; when he had read, an action followed that startled me. I saw him crush the paper in his hand; looking up, the half-turned face showed me set teeth, a sudden pallor, a swollen vein across his brow. Opposite him Mrs. Wynter still stood, her

eyes unavoidably seeing his emotion ; a flush, I noted, as she saw, slowly mounting to her cheek.

She stood before him for a few moments mute ; when he said nothing, she spoke timidly—

“ She must have thought of it, of course, suddenly. We shall just have time to write back before she starts—if she leaves on Tuesday.”

“ Does she say Tuesday ? ”

His accent was cold and quiet ; what emotion soever he might be feeling, the voice at least was under control entirely.

“ Yes. Will you read her letter ? ”

He took it from her hand, and sat down by the table with it. She came towards me.

“ Have you been at your German, my dear ? ”

“ Yes—Mr. Kingsley has been helping me.”

I rose and gathered my books together ; I went past her and left the room. We three did not encounter again till dinner-time. When we met together then, neither Mr. Kingsley nor Mrs. Wynter wore any but their usual demeanour. Very little was said about the approaching visit, and in the few words that passed Mr. Kingsley

took no part. Throughout the evening he was to me as he had been before his absence. One hour with Effie we passed pleasantly enough, turning over the many odds and ends in my portfolio.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE END OF FAIR WEATHER.

THE beginning of the next week brought us pleasant letters from Sydney and her husband—brought us also good tidings of Mr. Leslie's welfare.

Thus much with its commencement; its middle ushered in Miss Kingsley's visit.

She reached Riverston early in the afternoon, and within half an hour of her arrival I met her at luncheon. I came into the breakfast-room, and saw, seated at the table, a thin, dark, bright-eyed woman. An introduction from Mr. Wynter, distantly and ungracefully acknowledged by her, made us known to each other. I took a seat—by chance it was one opposite to her—in silence; and thence I made these notes.

She was, I saw at a glance, neither old nor

plain. Her brother was at this time in his fortieth year ; she, perhaps, was not more than three or four and thirty. She had sharp, elevated, handsome features ; she was dark, like her brother ; she also had, in shape and colouring, her brother's deep-set, shining eyes. Beyond this I could trace between them no resemblance. She was very lean ; so lean that her fleshlessness and her glittering eyes—for, unlike Mr. Kingsley's, neither drooping lid nor heavy lash interfered to hide them—gave her something of the aspect of a starved animal.

There was some little silence after my entrance, which it was not my part to break. Whether attendant on my arrival or not, I could not tell ; but certainly it seemed to me, that in all those assembled there was a chill and comfortless attitude of constraint. Nor did it pass away, though the silence presently did. Harsh and excited, as he paced the room, Mr. Kingsley's voice fell suddenly on my ear.

“Where is he hurt? Did you tell me? On the back, is it?”

"No—on the right shoulder. I was to tell you," said Miss Kingsley, slowly and frigidly, "that he would probably never have the proper use of his arm again."

"I hope to God he may!" burst the earnest rejoinder. "He is a young man—he is scarcely five-and-twenty—and with a wife, too."

"Well—he was not much of a workman."

"What has that to do with the matter?" suddenly turning on her. "If he had been the best workman I had, what difference would that have made?"

"Some difference to *you*, I think."

One flash fell on Miss Kingsley from her brother's eyes—a flash fierce, irate, impetuous. I hoped he would make no answer to her; but, able as he generally appeared to me to exercise self-control, that power seemed now to have deserted him.

"Is this the time, do you think," he burst out, "to be talking of loss or gain to *me*! The man has been injured in my service; I don't care whether he is the best hand I have or the worst—



I only know that he is *a man*, with a wife and child dependent on him ! ”

“ And so you will go and make them dependent on *you* for the rest of their lives,” sneered Miss Ursula. “ You have certainly found out a successful way of encouraging idleness ! Really, I sometimes wonder that half the men in the mine don’t manage to break their legs or arms by some convenient accident.”

No response.

“ Do you think that was the way my father managed things ? If it had been, would you be having the income you have now, do you suppose ? ”

“ Come, come—Ursula,” Mr. Wynter interposed, good-humouredly, “ you must not scold him for being anxious about his men. He serves his own interests, depend upon it, by being careful of them.”

“ Let him be as *careful* as he likes ; I am not objecting to that,” she said, sharply.

There was silence again. Miss Ursula laid down her knife and fork ; leaning forward, Mrs. Wynter’s timid voice was in the act of raising itself to offer

some farther refreshment, when again Mr. Kingsley's deep-chested tones made audience for themselves.

"Did you tell Fielding to write? Would he write to-day?"

"I did not tell him to do any thing. He would scarcely, however, I imagine, think it necessary to write when he knew I was coming here. Fielding is no fool."

"What do you mean by that?"

No answer. Mr. Kingsley planted himself beside her chair.

"What do you mean by saying that Fielding is no fool?"

"I mean"—sharply—"that he has more sense than his master."

"The more sense he has the better. No one values his good sense more than I do. But if you mean, Ursula"—and again the threatening eyes flashed—"that Fielding is indifferent to what I am most anxious for—if you mean that he would lift a finger to prevent my providing for this man—or for any man who has sustained injury in my

service—you are as wrong as ever you were in the course of your life !”

Miss Ursula crossed her hands, and a sarcastic smile curled her thin lips.

“I never desire to have a more hearty coadjutor than Fielding.”

No response.

“Or a worthier man about me.”

Except for that curl of the lip, Miss Ursula might have been deaf and dumb.

“No viewer that my father had was ever equal to him—either in business talent, or in kindness and humanity to every one beneath him.”

“Mrs. Wynter,” said Miss Ursula abruptly, “I think I *will* take a little of that jelly. I remember rather a delicate receipt for jellies that you had when I was last here. This is the same flavour, I think. By the way, talking of jellies, what a strange story that was about your last housekeeper. William Rupert’s sister !—what a singular thing ! Did you not consider it rather an equivocal connection for Sydney ?”

“Gilbert, will you take a glass of wine ?” Mr.

Wynter called over his shoulder. "Come, man—there is your seat; sit down, and eat something. What is the good of annoying yourself?"

There was an empty seat next to mine, and, with a muttered apology for his restlessness, Mr. Kingsley took it.

"Shall I send you a slice of beef?"

"No, thank you—there is something here: this will do."

Incontinently he plunged into a dish before him. It was a preparation of oysters—a kind of food I knew he never ate. With gravity he transferred a spoonful to his plate; with silent interest I watched his proceeding. His fork was in his hand, a mouthful was about to reach his lips: sudden, with a look of horror, down from his hand went fork and morsel together. I leaned back and laughed quietly.

"You knew I could not eat that: why did you not tell me?"

He turned to me with a smile that curled his lips, and shone pleasantly in his bright eye; it brought to him in an instant the likeness that the

last ten minutes had robbed him of: that passing vision of the Gilbert Kingsley of old was gone; again he was the friend whom I had learnt to trust—whom I had forgotten to fear.

“I could not tell what desperate experiment you were about to try. You looked so confident that I felt subdued.”

“You meant to punish me for trusting to myself. Well—now I give myself up into your hands. Tell me what I am to have.”

“If you reject the oysters there is not much choice. I think you must go to Mr. Wynter. By the way, that beef of his was very good yesterday.”

“Frank, give me some beef: Miss Haig recommends it.”

He raised his voice; the words reached Miss Ursula’s ear; sharp and quick she turned her head; the sentence she herself had been in the midst of died on her lips; the stealthy watch that I was perfectly conscious she had had on me for the last few moments was changed to a fixed and open stare. That stare expressed sudden and haughty surprise. That in her heart any manner of surprise

had really place, I credited no more than that such feeling existed in my own.

“You could not give him better advice, my dear,” Mr. Wynter exclaimed. “And let me help *you* to some, too. Come—a thin slice?”

“No—I have finished my meal,”—and with the words, for luncheon was an uncereemonious repast at Riverston, I rose from my seat.

“Come away, Effie—it is nearly three o’clock.”

She came with me—nothing loth. We closed the door behind us, and hand in hand we went upstairs in silence to our own quiet territory. The school-room window stood open: bright and pleasant streamed in the warm afternoon sunshine, and fresh and sweet across it blew a soft south wind. I leant out and drank a long refreshing draught of it: to me such medicine at most times was potent.

Effie brought out her French books: we sat down and read *Corinne*. That book the child in general liked well enough, but to day I had to reprove her more than once as we read for inattention. At one moment an abrupt pause brought her great

eyes up to my face ; there they rested—they grew passionate—they filled with tears.

“Miss Haig,” she burst out—“how she looked at you !”

“Is that a translation, Effie?”

A smile came fluttering nervously to the full lips : I stooped down and kissed them.

“Go on, mousie. *Ils s’amusaient*”—and I kept her to her lesson ; but my arm was round her for the rest of it.

We met again at dinner. I had my seat between Mrs. Wynter and Helen—two quiet women—and neither they nor I spoke much. What conversation there was took place for the most part between Miss Ursula and her two brothers. Weary talk it was ! Mr. Wynter’s voice was the single pleasant element in it : his right feeling, his good humour and good sense threw what sunshine it was possible to throw into it ; but to make it other than unhappy and uninteresting, irritating on the one side and painful on the other, was utterly beyond his power.

God help that brother and sister in their cheer-

less home! They had lived alone together, as I knew, for five years : dwelling upon that knowledge, there came a chill over me that made me shiver and shrink.

I had thrown no softening veil over what I saw or heard ; I had hidden from myself no unloving trait ; I had ignored no fault of tone or word ; I had listened to all with a pain that had grown very sharp : but now, over that pain, there came pity greater than all. Nay, it was not for *me* to condemn him ! My part was rather to rejoice that, amidst the bitter ordeal through which his life had led him, so much in him that was good and beautiful had been preserved.

Miss Ursula sat in the drawing-room with her hands folded before her. She had no work, nor seemed to desire any ; she looked at no book ; she had perhaps grown tired of talking, for she only opened her lips at intervals in concise sentences. She did nothing whatsoever but gaze before her with her bright shadowless eyes.

Full in front of her—a very target for those orbs—sat poor Mrs. Wynter, her head bent down



over her sewing, her small quick voice painfully and vainly suggesting topic after topic of conversation, till the nervousness that was distressingly creeping over her communicated itself even to her hands, and set the small fingers trembling as she worked.

Helen was gone, and Effie, mute and subdued, was hidden with a book in the bay window. For a full hour between those two women this weary scene was acted. *I* could give no help. Miss Ursula's intended manner towards me had once or twice already declared itself too plainly to make my interference with her a thing possible for me. Like Effie, I sat in the bay window, and read till the sun was low ; with Effie, when the gentlemen were returned to the drawing-room, I stole quietly away out of doors for half an hour's freedom and fresh air.

"Now, my mousie, run where you like—you look as pale as if you had been shut up all day."

"I will run to the top of the hill, and down," she said. "Come away!"

“Not to the top of the hill, Effie. You may perform that exploit by yourself.”

“But come to the foot of it, and then you can see me.”

“A mighty temptation, truly!”

I set her on her race, and I myself paced to and fro on a walk a little from the hill—a broad walk shaded by trees—those trees at intervals furnished with circular seats. On one of these I sat down presently, with the hill and Effie’s erratic figure before my eyes.

Her step fell noiselessly upon the grass ; not hers was that measured tread which presently met my ear. I listened while the sound of that footstep grew and neared : I knew it well—I had no need to turn my eyes. Quiet I sat till it terminated at my side, and a shadow stood between me and the evening western light.

“How quietly you and Effie crept away ! What have you done with her ?”

“She is up there on the hill : you will easily find her.”

“I do not want to find her : I am not going to her.”

He sat down by my side ; he sat looking away from me down the hill : more than a minute passed thus.

“ I have scarcely heard little Honor’s voice to-day,” he said at last, abruptly turning round. “ What makes her so silent ? ”

“ I have nothing to say.”

“ And when that is so you always hold ‘ your tongue ?—wise little woman ! But talk now ; I want you to talk to me : I am tired—my head is aching.”

He stooped down, leaning his head upon his hand. Pallid and weary-looking I saw his face.

“ You *look* as if your head ached. Would you not be better if you lay down ? ”

“ Do I disturb you ? ”

“ I was doing nothing.”

“ Then let me stay here : this does me more good than lying down.”

“ It is very pleasant here this evening. How yesterday’s wind has sunk ! There is scarcely enough now to stir a leaf.”

“ No—it is very still.”

"I was looking for autumn tints on the trees just now. The foliage is keeping its summer tints long this year."

"Have the autumn colours begun?"

"Here and there a branch is getting a golden hue, and the leaves have begun to fall from the lime-trees. To-morrow will be the first of September."

"Will it? I had forgotten."

"Look there, Honor," he said abruptly.

"Where?"

"Over there. Look how that dark cloud is swooping down into the amber. It was pure sky five minutes ago."

There had been a fair clear sunset, untouched by mist or cloud: the golden sea was blotted now by a winged incubus, leaden and dark, heavy and threatening. Its drawing on I had not noticed: how it had gathered I had not seen.

"It is sailing north—it will go past."

"Yes—but it moves very slowly. Before it goes, amber and gold and crimson will be gone too."

"I do not think so. Sunsets of that sort do not fade quickly: a sky like that often keeps bright till nightfall."

A pause of some moments.

"The first of September!" he said slowly.  
"Then I have been here almost three months."

"Two months and a half."

"Ay—I came in the middle of June. Honor, it has been a pleasant holiday."

I could not speak to that. Something, as his words reached me, struck sad and chill on my heart. I sat still, watching that slow sailing cloud.

"I ought to go home," he said, abruptly. "Do you think they are tired of me, Honor?"

He turned to me, but I stooped my head: I said "No," and nothing more.

"My brother will think I am as hard to get rid of as I was to bring here. But they are both very kind. They have been kind to you, have they not, little friend?"

"Every one at Riverston has been kind to me."

"Except *one*," he said quietly. "Honor, *I* was very hard to you—very harsh and ungentle."

I could have answered him, but between me and my words' utterance there rose a checking barrier. I struggled with it, but the victory was not mine.

"I have made you suffer—often I have been cruel to you. If I were to go away now, how would you think of me, Honor?"

He turned and touched the hands that lay folded on my knee; he looked into my face; he waited for an answer. I crushed the mutiny within me that had made me dumb; I freed my voice and spoke—

"If you have ever made me suffer, that time is past—I have forgotten that it ever was. You give me kindness now—for that kindness I care. If you were to go away—I should feel that the world was emptier!"

A smile kindled his face, parted his lips, illumined his eye. There was a crashing in the branches down the hill-side: notes of a young fresh voice came towards us.

He had time only for one moment's speech. In

his voice's deepest music these words reached my ear—

“Trust to me, Honor!”

The grasp tightened on my hands a moment, then parted and left me free.

“I saw you coming, uncle. Look here what I have gathered. They are almost beginning to get brown already. Last year we had a great day's nutting in the autumn: will you come and help us this year, Uncle Gilbert?”

“When are the nuts ripe, Effie?”

“Some time in October. Do you like nutting, Uncle Gilbert?”

“I should like to nut with Effie. But ‘some time in October’ is too far off to make promises about, I am afraid. I can't spend my life here, Effie.”

He had drawn her between his knees: she stood beside him, with her arm on his shoulder, and her hazel branches in her hands: she bent her grey eyes at his last words very quickly and gravely on his face.

“How long is Aunt Ursula going to stay?” came out abruptly.

“I don’t know.”

“She would not come so far only for a little while, would she?”

“I cannot tell : you had better ask herself, Effie.”

“No !” she said quickly. “But, Uncle Gilbert, you can’t go till she does ?”

“Why not ?”

“Oh no !” she cried, with a look of distress coming like a cloud over her fair face. “You know—you know, nobody thinks you will ; mamma and papa don’t—nobody does ! I should be so sorry—I should be so sorry, uncle !”

He drew her arm quietly about his neck ; with tears starting to her eyes, she bent to his face and kissed him ; he took the little hand that lay close to him, and softly smoothed it down.

“But you will not, uncle ?” wistfully.

“Don’t ask now, Effie ; I cannot tell.”

She leant her cheek upon his head, and stood beside him very still and silent. Thus together they made a picture, strange and very touching ; the child with her passing sorrow, and the man



worn with his life's forty years ; the young face with its rich fresh beauty, and the dark head and misshapen figure, round which her child's fair arm was clasped.

I rose up and touched that arm lightly.

"Effie, we must be going in."

"Why ? Are you cold ?"

"It is getting late, dear—or getting dark at least. How fast the evening has drawn in !"

"Fast enough. And look at those clouds. Where have they all come from ?"

Ay—whence had they come ? Not half an hour ago the sky had been pure of them : soft azure overhead, westward a glow of gold and amber ; now, thick, trooping, dark, they came, dusk banners trailing low ; the sky was hung with them.

"There will be rain to-night. I think the wind is rising already. Hush !"

We paused in our homeward walk to listen. Far off—a faint uncertain swelling amidst distant branches—we heard the voice awakening ; a rustle, sadly sweeping low to earth, a tremor and a

murmur, wild and slow. I wrapped my cloak about me—the air felt chill.

“It is bright still over there, westward. How strangely the light shoots out under that mass of dark cloud! Look how it falls on the house, Effie, and makes the ivy and the windows glitter.”

It fell on the house, but not on us; *we* stepped in shadow. Raising my eyes as the path, growing narrower, took us past those shining windows, full in the light of the lurid radiance that was flung on them, I saw Miss Kingsley's face. She sat and watched our onward coming.

Surely the night *had* grown cold. Before a storm the temperature at times knows strange and sudden changes. We looked at the glass as we crossed the hall. It had fallen.

“There must be a change of weather quickly; I think to-night.”

But in the drawing-room, as we entered, the broad bow window was still all keen ablaze with light.

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Deep in the night that threatened storm broke loose. I woke to hear its rising. From far off heights, swept downwards from hill-tops, swept over open meadow land, over the writhing heads of bending trees, it came. Its voice rose from the north—a wild hound bay—a cry of pain and hunger—a Banshee shriek: it tore the firmanent; before its breath, huge-massed, the heaped-up clouds rushed mad, tumultuous, wild-disordered over heaven. A sound of rain, dashed crashing upon roof and balcony; a rushing voice of heaven's sluices opened; a rent in the black clouds—a lightning flash, baring and burning on the sky. The kindled heaven grew alight with flame; from east to west, fierce glowing, tongue on tongue; one wide-spread, swift illumination.

More than an hour this storm endured. From Effie's room I watched the wasting of its fury, for the child had been awakened and I went to sit with her. I sat beside her till the blast was fallen; till lightning flame and thunder peal had ceased; till the chased flying clouds, shattered and torn, hung over heaven, rent and panting, to take

breath. When all was still I left her, with her heavy eyelids wearily weighing themselves again to sleep; but for me sleep came no more.

Too wakeful to lie still I sat beside my window. The night boasted a moon; a sickly crescent, fading in her final quarter. Poor was the light she gave; too weak to pierce the solid darkness of the night, till now at last the floating clouds, slow parting, showed her to the south, low on a clear horizon. There she hung, and thence she shone. I watched her while she waned and set.

The sky where she sank down had cleared to a pallid azure, pure and fair. Upwards, departing as a scroll, the clouds were rolling back; the furling banners lifting up their waves, like the slow sweeping off of armies. To the tossed night peace had come back and rest.

I sought my bed. There was a rising star trembling upon that south horizon as I broke my vigil; one dumb and solitary herald of a coming day.

## CHAPTER VII.

URSULA KINGSLEY.

WERE it for good or for evil, Miss Kingsley was no cipher. All Riverston acknowledged that. No one at Riverston, man, woman, or child, more cordially acknowledged it than I.

Utterly slighting in her manner to me ; speaking to me as often as to the servants who waited on her ; and pointedly showing, by every means within her power, that she considered me a menial, like one of them—I, however, did not pass four-and-twenty hours in the house with her before I was perfectly aware that, contemptible as Miss Ursula might consider me, she wasted no small portion of her time in watching me. Reader, I do not feign surprise at this ; why she watched me, herself did not know better than I ; what by her surveillance

she hoped to gain, I was keenly alive to. Clearly understanding this object of hers, having a vision, too, which time did not prove to be a false one, of the manner of woman that she was, I sat down and felt the sinews of my strength to cope with her.

I am no coward, but from the thought of a combat such as Miss Kingsley sought I shrank. Some weapons a woman cannot drag herself to use, though death stares in her face ; though the sickness of the coming hunger that is to steal life from body and soul is creeping over her. The adversary may handle these ; the woman whose life's blood is in the struggle cannot.

This I felt and knew ; but not for this knowledge did I faint or fear. What right had I to think that the struggle would be left to me ? My heart was warm with an echo that still rang in it ; strong as a talisman, that echo kept back fear.

Had I expected to find no change my faith might have known eclipse ; but change I had looked for ; I had strengthened myself to bear it ; and in the succeeding days I found it. Miss Kingsley watched well ; she was too quick to

prevent—too sharp to intercept—too swift of motion, not a score of times to snatch my cup of water from my lips. Between it and me she stood, harshly demanding of me to give it up and make no sign. That order I obeyed ; that pain I accepted. My rich full goblet I let her take from me ; *that* was the luxury of life, not its necessity ; its frugal absolute need, spite of that robbery, was cared for. The draught was snatched from me ; I lived on scanty sips, on drops doled out to me—a nectar rich, if it was sparely given—a wine sweet with the grape's reddest blood. Tasting of these, faith fed her strength ; not feeble did she grow or lean ; nay, she grew stalwart, firm—a thing of thews and sinews. I did not fear. Throughout these days lonely I might be often ; faint-hearted or fearful I was never once.

To no one was Miss Kingsley genial. Mrs. Wynter quaked before her ; the rest, if they escaped quaking, showed nevertheless, by tokens involuntary and manifold, that some blighting influence had with her presence come amongst them.

Silent, watchful, unoccupied, unsympathetic, she

sat amidst us, cold as winter, sharp as steel. Always cool, self-possessed, decided; always scornfully self-dependent, yet spending her day in a dreary idleness; always watching every living thing about her with those cat-like, glittering, depthless eyes of hers, she moved amongst us a thing cold, lonely, devoid of every sacredness from love bestowed on her, or given by her.

To this day I do not know whether Miss Kingsley entertained affection for any created thing. I suppose, if she did, the object of that emotion was her brother Gilbert; he was the nearest to her in blood, and the most closely allied by circumstances—but, judging by outward signs, I should as soon have suspected latent affection between the fierce cat in the stable-yard and the chained mastiff at the stable-door, as between her and Mr. Kingsley. Jealous of him she was—jealous of his acts, of his friends, of his likings and dislikings; but it was jealousy springing not from love, but from pride. The whole fabric of her dreary life was built up upon this one solitary passion—this cold and lonely and haughty pride of name and house.



“The Kingsleys have been in England eight hundred years,” I heard her say fiercely once, “and never was there a woman of them—save one—who ever soiled her fingers.”

“And she?”

“She married a man beneath her—and her father shut his door upon her, and never saw her face again.”

A hard, pitiless man! And this woman, with her folded hands—whose folly and mystery of idleness I somewhat comprehended now—she was a fit descendant from him!

“We have married with the best houses in the land. There is the blood of more than one king in our veins.”

The *blood* of a king! Ay, the blood might be *her* portion: the soul, the spirit, the nature of a king—if *they* had descended—had taken, well I knew, a nobler shelter than the lean chilness of *her* bosom.

Yet, Reader, I do not seek to scoff at pride of birth. Something of it I have myself; for that name of mine, worker though I have been for my own bread, has its own honour and antiquity—the

one not to be soiled, nor the other to be forgotten by me ; but Miss Kingsley's pride was an ignoble thing. A loveless thing, hard and stern, cold as iron—a passion without a passion's warmth—a rank weed—a fosterer of narrowed thoughts, of cruel deeds, of selfishness that would hew through adamant to gain its end.

The whole house had been silent to me concerning Miss Kingsley before she came : all save Effie were silent still. Tortured into passionate confession, *she* came to me within four-and-twenty hours of her aunt's arrival, in a paroxysm of emotion that, to say the truth, struck me less with amazement than with keen pain for her. I could do little to help her. Miss Kingsley's simple presence and conversation, I quickly found, filled her with a nervous, impetuous indignation, that had a dangerously prejudicial effect upon her. Her excitable temperament soon grew grievously disturbed : day after day she would come to me, her grey eyes flashing, and her clear dark cheek burning with the deep flush of held-in anger, and burst into vehement passion in my presence.

These passionate outbursts it was my duty to repress, and that duty I occasionally performed ; but often I found myself the subject of her emotion, and the child's generous affection for me was a strange disarmers.

"I cannot bear it when she speaks about *you* !" was her defence—and, God knows, I had not so many to stand up for me that I could afford to throw away even this feeble championship. Nor was I always calm when Miss Kingsley spoke of me—still less always humble, falling meekly to the ground before her sarcasms or her innuendoes. To be that—right or wrong—was not in my nature. At times, when she spoke, a retort fell from my lips, to the full as bitter as her arousing sneer. This I tell you, Reader, without excuse or justification : judge me for it as you please.

In my lifetime I had had enemies before this, and had fought against them, with none to help me or take my part. I fought now not altogether alone. "If papa had been there," Effie cried passionately once—"if Uncle Gilbert had been there, she would not have dared to speak so to you!"

Effie was wrong. Mr. Wynter's or Mr. Kingsley's presence changed Miss Ursula's manner to me in no whit. But to *me* it made a difference. *She* might be unsubduable, but it was *they* now who took it on them to resent. I might lay by my weapons; I might rest peaceably, without care or fear: for the first time in my life I stood still, and gathered round me, in their presence, the warm sense of a kind and watchful protection.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ON THE EAST HILL.

THÉRE was certain new machinery constructing for Mr. Kingsley's mines, concerning which he found it necessary, some short time after his sister's arrival, to pay a second visit to London. His absence, however, was to be short.

We had driven to Hastings on the afternoon of the day before he was to leave us. Our journeys thither took place commonly before dinner : to-day, however, we had been detained by visitors, and had been forced in consequence to dine at luncheon-time, and devote the afternoon to our town expedition.

Mrs. Wynter and Miss Kingsley, Effie and I, were the occupants of the carriage. Except Effie, we had all a variety of shopping details to transact;

when our business of that sort was finished, it was past five o'clock. There was a call to be made on an old invalid lady—a homely quiet soul—on whom an invasion of four visitors would be too heavy an infliction. We had arranged by the way, that, during the making of this call, Effie and I should betake ourselves elsewhither: we now parted company. Mrs. Wynter and her sister-in-law went their appointed way: Effie and I, dismissing the carriage, turned our steps towards the East Hill.

To me it was pleasant to visit this ancient seagirt Hastings. I had a kindly liking for the picturesque old town—a warmer feeling for the rocky hills that bound it in—a love warmest of all for the wide deep sea, that stretched its great breadth to the softened azure dimness of the blue horizon—blue meeting blue, pallid and soft, on the long low distant line. Riverston could boast no such view as that.

“We shall have a pleasant hour, mousie. Come away! We shall see the sun set from the hill.”

We were already at the hill-side, mounting the

narrow pathway: suddenly below us came a voice—a call—

“Effie!”

“Uncle!”

She turned and sprang back to meet him: she came to him with eager hands stretched out, with bright eyes shining a welcome.

“Uncle, how did you come?”

“How did *you* come, Effie?”

“Oh! but we left you at home. Did you come to meet us?”

“Perhaps I might, if I had known you were to be here—but you did not tell me, Effie.”

“I did not know myself: I would have told you if I had. I don’t think Miss Haig knew.”

His pleasant smiling eyes looked up to question me.

“We made an arrangement as we came along,” I said, “to leave Mrs. Wynter and your sister at Miss Linton’s: we are to call for them again at seven o’clock.”

“And mean time?”

“Mean time, Effie and I are going for a ramble.”

“Up with you then, Effie,” and, as she turned again to mount, he followed her.

“Now”—when we had reached the top—“in what direction?”

“As near to the sea as possible. I know a little nook—the cosiest place in the world to sit in.”

“Come away, then—show us where it is.”

I led the way over the short dry yellowing grass, the soft breeze blowing freshly in our faces, the open rocky hill-top, the distant swelling downs, the wide dazzling sea about us.

“I like it! Is it not pleasant, Mr. Kingsley?”

I looked, perhaps, as I felt—happy with invigorated life and energy: I met a smile on his eyes and on his lip, bright and contented as my own.

“Yes—it is pleasant—it gives strength: a scene and an air like this give zest to existence.”

“You like this hill breeze? So do I. If I lived on a hill-top for a month, I should come back to Riverston as rosy as Effie is now.”

“Effie is dark: she looks well with a deep colour. You do not want it. Your hue is the hue of snow at sunset: Effie’s is the flush of noonday sun.”



*Was* mine no deeper than snow at sunset ? I felt so glad—so free at heart—it seemed to me that the leaping blood *must* have given to my cheek some richer colouring. But, be it pale rose or be it some warmer glow, what mattered it if it contented him ?

Joyously, with light steps over the springy grass, we walked ; in glad tones we talked : the little nook I spoke of presently reached, there—sheltered by a rude low wall of rock behind us—we sat down, and faced the wide expanse of sea.

The tide was coming in : swept by a fresh soft breeze already the sea was lapping at the base of the rock below us ; the sands were hidden ; from the spot on which we sat, to the distant line where the dome of the sky was cleft, there lay an unbroken spread of water ; fair it stretched and bright, sparkling and glittering with changing hues—azure from overhead—from westward gleaming gold and crimson.

“The sun still sets behind Beachy Head. We shall not see him dip down into the sea.”

“No—not to night.”

“I never saw him set over the sea—never in my life.”

“Did you not? Did you never live by the sea?”

“No—never.”

“Where have you spent all your life, little friend? In Devonshire? In that one spot of Devonshire always?”

“Yes—always there.”

“And you know nothing of the world but that one little corner?—that, and Riverston?”

“You laugh at me, Mr. Kingsley—but how could I help it? I could not go wandering about alone. Though I *have* done that a little, too. I was obliged to do it when I set forth to seek my fortune.”

“I should like to have seen you then!”

“Setting out on my search? Oh no, you would not!” I cried quickly. “You do not know how solitary a figure I was—how lonely and friendless I was!”

He turned to me; with tender pity he looked into my eyes; gently he touched the hands that I had suddenly clasped.

"Little wanderer!" he softly said.

"But I did not wander long, Mr. Kingsley. Before many weeks I found a home."

"Yes;—and that home has kept you fast ever since?"

"It has kept me—it has sheltered me kindly."

"And you are content in it?"

"Yes."

"That 'yes' has its reservation, Honor."

"I cannot help it, Mr. Kingsley."

"It means, that meanwhile, in your heart, you have still your own plans and hopes?"

"If it does—am I different from other people?"

"No—I did not say so."

His tone had grown grave: before he spoke again, there fell between us a silence of some moments: when he broke that silence at length, there was an accent almost of trouble in his voice.

"I have always thought," he said, "that you were ambitious. Once I told you so, but you would give me no answer. Once I believed"—and his eye watched me as he spoke—"that advancement was your first object in life."

“There you were wrong.”

“Has it never been so?”

“Never.”

“But it *is* an object with you—if not the first and greatest?”

“Mr. Kingsley, you answer your questions in your own mind before you ask them. You have a preconceived theory about me in your head, and that theory is unjust to me. You treat me as if I were a cold selfish schemer; you think of me as wrapped up in dreams of self-aggrandizement. That sort of ambition is a man’s ambition, not a woman’s: yours it may be—it is not mine!”

I spoke warmly; his answer was a quiet smile, that mute response for many moments was all he gave me.

“That sort is mine as little as yours,” he said at last. “My station suits me. If a higher were within my reach I would not take it. And yet I *have* ambitions. I have desires that took birth in my childhood—objects that I have striven to accomplish—ends that for years it has been the solitary endeavour of my life to gain.”

"I know them, Mr. Kingsley."

"How do you know them? I never spoke about them to you?"

"That does not signify—I know them. I know what they have tried to do: I know a little of what they have done."

A moment's pause.

"Does the subject interest you?"

"Yes."

"Do you care to hear about it?"

"Very much."

He was silent for a little while: presently, with small exordium, he began quietly to speak. He drew for me a picture, graphic and clear—a home picture of the men and the society he lived amongst. He painted them as they were when he came amongst them—a gloomy, savage, desolate picture—ininitely sad—dark with fierce shadows: then followed the clear swift outline-sketching of his own work—his plans, his efforts, his failures, his successes.

Thus much he told me. To myself, as he spoke, I set in one figure that he only showed in shadow:

in the midst of that wild picture my fancy drew for me the lion head, the misshapen form of that man who walked amidst his ranks of savage workers, sad and strong, with his blazing eye and his tender heart. That finished the picture : completed, I looked upon it with swelling thoughts.

“I feel,” he said—and the tone was sad enough, “that my movement is but a snail’s pace : I have tried to quicken it ; I have worked hand and brain, and still the mountain seems before me. I do not know how long I may be left here : when I am gone, I do not know what sort of heart may take my place. I often think that what I am doing now may be like the one stroke at evening of the woodman’s axe to clear a forest. The night may be coming—and the work be still undone.”

“If God takes the workman, He will see to the work’s ending. The woodman’s one stroke may let in a ray of sunshine to the earth that will be visible to many a coming eye.”

“God grant it ! And should it not be so——”

“*You* at least will have earned your wages.”

“And those for whom I have worked, Honor ?”

“*They* will be in God’s hands, Mr. Kingsley. You can but spend your life for them.”

He said no more: he stood beside me silent and still, the deep bright eyes stretching far across that wide illuminated sea.

“Mr. Kingsley”—I spoke to him after a silence of some minutes—“if you had had the shaping of your own life, would this still have been your ambition?”

“No; this would have seemed weary drudgery to me twenty years ago.”

“Does it never seem drudgery now?”

“Ay—at times it does. But I have learnt now to have a greater respect for drudgery—and for myself a smaller esteem.”

“And long ago—what did you want to do?”

“When I was a boy,” and a smile that I liked came to his lips—a smile not scornful, but full of a sad kindly pity—“when I was a boy I was a dreamer, with great faith in my own strength and will. I thought that I might carve something out of my life that would live after me.”

“We many of us think so before we grow to be

full men and women. We would all if we could, I suppose, be stars in heaven—and find it a little hard to be nothing but undistinguishable nebulae around the stars.”

“ Mine was no wish for fame—as fame is ordinarily thought of. It was a wish—nay, I do not know why I should say it *was*,” he said, with a half smile at himself: “ the *wish* has never changed—the only change has been in the belief of gaining it.”

“ Well ? ”

“ I never cared to have my name on men’s lips—I have had no wish to keep it in men’s memories: the only fame I ever coveted was life for the thing that I should do.”

“ That *is* really desire for fame, Mr. Kingsley. You may not want your *name* to be remembered ; but I think you would want the work that you might do to be recognised clearly to be the work of a man. You would want it to be work of your brain, too—not work alone of your hands. You would be content, perhaps, to be the forgotten conceiver of a great cathedral—but not, I think, to be the workman who hewed its blocks of stone.”



“Say it is so—do you condemn such aspiration?”

“I do not condemn it. I think that for fame like that, if it were attainable, man or woman might barter every possession upon earth!”

While we spoke the sun had sunk. He had been standing low on the horizon when we reached this eminence, a mingled pomp of dark-winged and gold-enkindled clouds waiting around to grace his settling. These had rested motionless while he went down: now they slowly rose and sailed in a dark phalanx north, leaving behind a background of clear azure, glowing with light, and jewelled with thin atoms of lingering radiant cloud.

We stood and gazed; and, as we stood, above this lower glory, the whole high arch of heaven grew presently ablaze with splendour—one universal glow of stormy light, flung up as from a world-wide fire, dyeing each fray and edge and trailing tangle of the loose, low, hanging clouds with threatening, wild, lurid fire. They glowed with its deep light, the dark intense blood-flame permeating their vaporous and moving depths; on, like red smoke

belched out from some huge furnace, tumultuous they rolled and sped, while, north, and south, and east, swept horizontal great inky layers—stratum heaped on stratum—of black cloud, gloomy as eclipse, and wrathful with a boding threatening of storm. The breeze was freshening, too: over the rock below, the water—for the tide was now near to the full—was flinging itself with quick and sudden strokes.

We sat and watched; we spoke but little. We, with our talk about man's fame—about earthly architecture and earthly workmen—seemed pitifully weak and small in the presence of this God-created glory. Me at least it subdued: I sat and looked upon it with the passionate reverence and love and yearning which, embracing scenes like this, grows often so near akin to the sharpest pain.

“Effie, we must be going.”

The colours were keen in the sky yet, but our time had come.

We rose up and went back the way that we had come—across the breezy hill-top again, over the slippery dried grass. Our pleasant hour was almost over.

"Are you going to drive home with us, Mr. Kingsley?"

He turned his head quickly.

"I shall not return to Riverston to-night."

"Not at all? Then we shall not see you again before you go?"

"No—as I am here I shall remain all night, and take an early train to-morrow."

At that up rose a murmur of complaint.

"Oh, uncle, you never said you were going away at once!"

"If I go early to-morrow, Effie, I may be back, perhaps, a day sooner."

"But that is only *perhaps*, Uncle Gilbert?"

"Mousie, most things are only *perhaps*."

"If Uncle Gilbert came back to-night, that would be something *sure*. Will you not come, uncle?"

He took the little hand that had touched his arm, and caressed it fondly.

"I have said good-bye to them at home: I must keep to my plan, Effie."

"Then I am sorry," she said—and the great eyes grew moist.

They walked on a few steps in silence, hand in hand ; then presently a step came nearer to my side.

“ Little friend, when I am away what are you going to do ? ”

“ Teach Effie—read—do my drawing—learn my German—ramble about Riverston.”

“ You will have plenty of occupation ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You will be too busy,” after a moment, “ almost to remember that I am away ? ”

“ Do I live amidst such a host of friends that I am likely to forget the absence of one of them ? ”

A smile dawned in the shining eyes—kindled their depth ; kindly and warm its radiance fell on me.

“ When I come back, then—will you welcome me ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Truly and kindly ? with the smile that little Honor knows how to give when she is glad.”

“ I will welcome you. How I may look or smile I cannot tell, but—I shall be glad.”

"*I* too shall be glad," he said ; I barely heard the words, for they were spoken low ; "how much more glad than Honor, God knows."

We had reached the descent again ; down the steep path we went one by one. At the foot of the hill we found the carriage, and, Mr. Kingsley still with us, we drove back into the town.

Mrs. Wynter did not keep us waiting ; she and Miss Kingsley we found, when we called for them, in full readiness to return to us. A few moments brought them into sight ; the first sight *they* beheld, as they emerged into the street, was Mr. Kingsley standing at the carriage door.

I have seen many looks on Miss Ursula's face, but a look of keener anger than at this moment burst upon it, I never witnessed. She gave a step forward like a spring, and faced her brother.

"What are you come for ? What are you doing here ?" she cried.

In him neither voice nor muscle moved ; as if unconscious alike of her question and her presence, he turned away, and only spoke in answer to the milder inquiry of his gentler sister.

"I had various things that were better done to-night. I shall sleep here, Helen, and go by an early train to-morrow."

"Will you not come back with us? Do you think you could not, Gilbert?"

"Oh, pray, don't press him, Mrs. Wynter!" and Miss Ursula swept past me to her place. "He takes such wise, deliberate projects into his head, that *I* should not be surprised to see him at Riverston half an hour after we get there ourselves. It will be just what we might expect."

"Where did you find them, Gilbert? Did you only meet them just now?"

"No—we have been on the hill together."

"Oh, I am glad! That was pleasant!"

"I must not detain you; it is late already. I shall see you again in a week. Good bye, Helen!" He bade us farewell one by one. To me was given the last, and closest, and most lingering handshake; to me were uttered his last words. He stood back as the carriage moved, and by the smile upon his lips he sought and obtained a final smile from mine.

A few words and we dropped into silence. On we drove, into the balmy, peaceful, autumn night. Away from the sea, along the pleasant country road, all green yet with unchanged summer-trees, on to the familiar sight of Riverston hills, and Riverston woods and turrets, clear against the sky.

The night had drawn in long before we were home. As we drove up at last before the house, the sudden blaze of light from the opened hall door for a few moments dazzled our sight. I did not recognize the figure that swiftly descended the steps, until after a moment I heard Mr. Wynter's voice beside us.

"You runaways! we thought we were never to see more of you. Come out, mamma, we have been waiting for you all night!"

She came out, talking the while.

"You see, when we were in town, we thought it would be such a good thing to go and——"

Suddenly the unfinished sentence ceased—broke off—fled into a wild ringing cry. There grew around her a confused sound, an agitated hum of

excitement; in the midst of it a voice I did not know.

I rose and sprang out. She stood with her arms clasped about a stranger's neck—her sobbing face pressed on his bosom.

In a few moments we were told the news. It was her son, Frank, come home.



## CHAPTER IX.

## A NEW INMATE.

EFFIE was opening her books on the school-room table by my side ; it was after breakfast—ten o'clock, and our day's work about to begin.

“Now, Effie, not an idle moment. Remember, the busier you are the sooner you will get free.”

“Yes—and Frank said he would wait for me till one o'clock.”

But as Effie spoke the school-room door sprang open ; and there, at the moment, before us, evidently with no intention whatsoever of waiting at all, stood Frank Wynter.

“Shut your books, Effie !” he cried. “Stow them all away ! There are to be no more lessons.”

“Frank, what do you mean ?”

“Holidays, Effie ! Holidays in my honour.

Miss Haig's occupation's gone—a fact which Miss Haig does not believe,” and he came forward merrily, and seated himself face to face with me at the table.

“Does Mrs. Wynter say that Effie is to be set at liberty?”

“My mother says so.”

“Entirely free?”

“Free as the winds! All school-books to be locked up: school pinafores to be taken off and folded: Miss Haig to shut the school-room door, and to put the key in her pocket.”

“Till when, Frank? Frank, till when?”

“Till a second fiat goes forth, puss. Don't look into the future, Effie. Enjoy the present, as I do. Youthful spirits, like you and me, must not endanger our digestion by too much forethought. We leave all that sort of thing to Miss Haig.”

“Frank! Miss Haig is not as old as you are.”

“Effie, do not jest with the feelings of respectable ladies.”

“She is twenty-two! she was twenty-two last month.”

"Hu-sh ! hu-sh !" soothingly.

"And you will be twenty-four in January !"

"Effie, you are a young lady of most singular manners ! Are you not aware that nothing is more repugnant to all members of polite society than to fling these sort of facts into their faces ? You have in all probability, in this unfortunate moment, committed an indiscretion whose consequences will be painfully visible between Miss Haig and myself throughout our entire future intercourse."

"Frank !" and the child looked aghast at him, with her colour rising.

"Effie !" I put my arm round her shoulder—"you simplest of all children ! Oh, mousie ! when will you leave off believing every word that is said to you ?"

"Were you joking, Frank ? Oh, Frank, yes you were ! What a shame of you !"

"What a shame of my sister Euphemia, aged eleven years last May, to be such a wonderful little simpleton ! Effie, have you got any brains at all ? Do you make any thing of this baby whatever, Miss Haig ?"

"Pray, Mr. Frank," I addressed him somewhat quickly, "where amongst you do you imagine the largest portion of the family brains to lie?"

Bowing with great gravity, he put his forefinger to his own brow.

"The *second* portion, then?"

"The second—hm—let me see! The second parcel resides, I am inclined to think, within the head of my sister Sydney—unless, indeed, she has lost it lately—which, considering all things, I am half tempted to suspect."

"Considering *what* things?"

He looked up with a laugh so like Sydney's that I could almost for a moment have taken the bright eyes before me for hers: he answered with a half hesitation that gave a kind of boyishness to his manner, which, unworthy as it might be of his four-and-twenty years, came to him not unfrequently, nor was unpleasant—to my thinking—when it came.

"Considering—why—oh, I mean, what she has been doing—flying out into romance, and—and all the rest of it. It was the wildest thing I ever heard

of! Miss Haig, who put it all into her head? Was it you?"

"Do you suspect me?"

"I am half inclined. Sydney was—not quite her own mistress with you—was she?"

"Did she ever tell you so?"

"No—not exactly. Perhaps, if it was so, she would scarcely have confessed it."

"What grounds have you for your suspicion, then?"

He looked up with a laugh—he shook his head gaily.

"Miss Haig—I protest! My mental structure is not fitted to repel cross-examination."

"Make an honest confession, then."

"No—no—at this stage of our acquaintance, quite impossible! Some day, perhaps——"

"Frank," interrupted a gentle voice from the threshold, "have you told Miss Haig what we were talking about?"

"My dear mother, I gave your message ten minutes ago."

“Then, my dear boy, why are you keeping your father waiting?”

He sprang up with an odd look of consternation on his face.

“Upon my word, I utterly forgot my father! Effie, puss—fly! Get your hat and come after me! Mother—Miss Haig—Good-bye!”

He was gone from the room almost before the words were well uttered: in another minute we heard his clear gay voice shouting from the walk below the school-room window, and soon we saw him at full speed springing across gravel path and lawn, the tall lithe figure graceful and free in its swift action, the sun shining brightly on curling locks of gold-brown hair.

A proud smile kindled in Mrs. Wynter's face; I watched it while it rose: ere it was gone, detecting my gaze, she suddenly turned to me and laughed.

“I like to have him here again,” she said. “I like to hear his voice: it sounds so familiar and so pleasant. I could almost fancy sometimes, for a moment, when I listen to it, that it was the old time

come back again—when they were all here,” she said softly.

“You never told me how like Sydney he was.”

“Do you think him like her? Ah, but Sydney was never so good-looking as Frank!”

“No—decidedly not—but very like her nevertheless he is: his face has numberless tricks of expression like hers.”

“Poor Sydney!—she would have liked to see him.”

“Perhaps she still may.”

“Oh no!—he can only be with us three months at the farthest, and it may be much less. And then he will be away—for years again probably. Oh, my dear!” and the tears sprang suddenly up—“if you ever have a son, try to keep him from going to sea!”

I was seated half an hour afterwards alone within the same room, pleasantly whiling away the beginning of my holiday in the perusal of a new book, when a second time Frank Wynter uncereemoniously flung open the door and presented himself before me.

“Miss Haig!”

“Mr. Frank, will you let me speak first? Are you aware that you have no business within this room?”

“Have I not?”

“Not one bit! This is my especial territory. Across this threshold neither man nor woman steps without permission given.”

“A thousand pardons! What am I to do?”

“What did you come to do?”

“I wanted to speak to you.”

“Speak to me, then.”

“And for the future?”

“For the future do what other people do—knock at the door.”

“I will never transgress again. By the way, Miss Haig,” looking about him—“what a pretty room you have made of this! What have you done to it?”

“I have done nothing.”

“You have taken down the drab curtains.”

“Not *I*.”

“Did you not? Had you no hand in choosing these red ones?”



"No, I had nothing to do with the matter: they were here when I came."

"But these things are yours?—these books—this little desk—the portfolio—these flowers—did not you arrange them?"

"No—Effie did."

"Effie!—I did not think she could be turned to so much use! Effie arranged them, did she? Did Effie do this, too?" and, triumphant at last, he caught up and held out to view a sketch of a bit of country road that I had been lately making.

"No—that is no handiwork of Effie's. That is my property, Mr. Frank; and, as it chances to be in an excessively unfinished state, you had better replace it where you found it."

"Are you going to finish it?"

"Possibly."

"When it is done will you hang it up?"

"Hang it up? No, certainly not!"

"Why not? I like drawings on the walls."

"You will never see *my* drawings on the walls—depend upon that!"

"You are selfish, Miss Haig. You should not keep all the fruits of your talents to yourself."

"The fruits of my talents lie in my portfolio. If they are worth looking at, my acquaintances may go there for them."

"Thank you ! *One* of your acquaintances will avail himself of that permission forthwith."

He turned swiftly to the spot where my portfolio stood : I arrested him.

"Stand where you are, Mr. Frank ! I think you announced, when you came into this room, that you had something to say to me : will you excuse my asking if your sole object was to talk about drawings and crimson curtains ?

"No, no," laughing carelessly—"certainly not. This has been a digression. I was coming to my subject presently."

"Will you oblige me by coming to it now ?"

"Before I look at your drawings ?"

"I am strongly tempted to believe that no more drawings of mine will be in your hands this morning. Come—your business !"

"Miss Haig, your impatience confuses me !

Give me time. I came with a message from Effie."

"You are an excellent errand-goer ! Well ?"

"With a petition—a humble request, that if Miss Haig were not too busy—too deep, for instance, in her German metaphysics—in fact, I came to say that we two, loiterers and idlers in the sunshine, have been left alone to entertain each other—my father has been called away—and—and in short we find that amusement rather slow."

"Indeed !"

"Moreover, there is a certain place we desire to go to—a place of great beauty, Effie says—a haunt of Miss Haig's, to which Miss Haig alone knows the means of access."

"Is that Effie's statement ?"

"Precisely."

"Well ?"

"Consequently—we want Miss Haig."

"Where is Effie ?"

"Down below. Making her way up a tree when I last caught sight of her."

"Mr. Frank," and I rose up, laughing against my

will, "you are very clearly not to be trusted alone with the charge of her. Go and tell her I will come."

"Bravo!" the clearest of young voices suddenly saluted me with—"Bravo!—achieved!"

I stopped short to gaze at him; he wheeled round and looked me in the face: the humour of that look conveyed itself to me; I could not regard him seriously.

"When you feel inclined to cheer again, Mr. Frank, will you have the kindness to put your head out at that window?"

"Certainly! Can I oblige you in any other way, Miss Haig?"

"You can oblige me by going down-stairs and getting Effie out of that tree before I come."

"And by returning when that business is accomplished——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Frank, by *not* returning. My sanctum has been sufficiently invaded to-day. With your leave, I will turn you out now, and shut the door."

And I performed that ceremony before I parted from him.

In sober earnest I soon discovered that in no way whatever was Frank Wynter to be trusted with the management of his sister. A veritable boy's nature was in him—open and free, honest, riotous, and restless: with him Effie was as little to be kept within any sort of bounds with respect to bodily exertion or fatigue, as if I had set her on the back of a young untamed horse, and let her loose. Once after this morning I left them to pass the day in one another's company: the issue of this *tête à tête* appeared at nightfall in torn attire—in hands and face scratched and wounded—in non-attendance alike on luncheon and dinner—in an overwhelming fatigue on the part of Effie, and laughter, the most mischievous and triumphant, in Frank's mischief-loving bright brown eyes.

There was no help for it. I had meant to be busy; I had meant, while my holidays lasted, to have worked both at my German and my drawing; I saw myself on the sudden forced to lay aside alike grammar and dictionary, paint-brush and crayon, and to take possession of my pupil—not indeed to give her lessons in the school-room, but

out of doors, over hill and valley, over wood and dale—to perform the often harder task of keeping her, and not seldom Frank himself, in check and order.

I do not complain—it was a sufficiently pleasant fortnight. Quicker than I had thought it would have done, it passed. Through its whole length there had been one absentee from Riverston, nor when it closed was he returned. Daily, almost for a week, we had looked for him: he did not come. Daily, watching with an interest which, had I yielded to it, might have grown presently feverish and fierce enough, I thought I traced a singular satisfaction dawning slowly upon Miss Kingsley's face. What that look augured I knew not: what ill portent—if any—it bore for me, I did not fathom. Few instincts of my nature lead me towards fear, and those few I have ever tried to crush. I might have had cause for yielding to them now, but I did not yield.

## CHAPTER X.

## A FALL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

EFFIE was not well one morning. I did not know if the child had been over-fatigued or had caught cold, but she was pale and languid; and I would have kept her in the house had not her urgent appeal against such imprisonment, added to her mother's indifference about the matter—for Effie was never known to be ill—caused me, half against my judgment, to rescind my half-formed sentence, and let her forth.

It was a pleasant autumnal day, and after luncheon we set out for a quiet walk together. Frank had gone early with his father to Hastings; no malign influence was present to tempt either one or other of us to any heroic deeds. We took our walk peaceably—one of the old, slow, quiet

rambles that we had been used daily to perform before the brisk advent of Frank Wynter.

He had gone to Hastings to-day, I said, and I thought we were rid of him till dinner-time. In this ere long I found myself mistaken. We had not been half an hour out of the house when a sudden loud shout behind our backs assailed us, a shrill prolonged whistle flew through the air, and in another half minute, panting and ruddy-cheeked, Frank stood beside us.

“Why did you not wait for me? Puss, did I not tell you? Miss Haig, was this a way to treat me, when I have flown on the wings of expectation all the way from Hastings?”

“That was your fault, not ours. What were you doing with the wings of expectation to-day?”

“What do I do with them every day? What is all one’s life but a state of prolonged expectation?”

“*Yours* is not much else, I think.”

“Nor yours—is it, Miss Haig? Ah, but, to be sure, I do not understand women’s lives!”



“You really think you do not? You absolutely believe that some portion of that legible page of history is hidden from you?”

“Miss Haig, if you get ironical I shall fly from you. Come, Effie, are you ready for a run?”

“No, most decidedly, Mr. Frank! Ready for no run to-day. If *your* desires lead you in that direction, you must gratify them alone.”

“Why? Is she really not well? Pussie, what is the matter?”

“Nothing—it is only a headache. Never mind, Frank; don’t, please,” she said, for the child had little love of being treated as an invalid.

“Do you mean to come with us?” I asked, “or are we too quiet for you to-day?”

“Are you ever too quiet for me? Are you ever too much or too little of any thing?”

“Who? I or Effie?”

“Effie! Is not Effie in extremes all day long? a parcel of faults from head to foot? How could I mean Effie?”

“With about as much reason as you could mean me, I think. Mr. Frank, do you know it has struck

me once or twice lately, that you have begun to fall into a very bad habit."

"I will break myself off it!"

"Before you know what it is?"

"It is enough that *you* say it is bad."

"Take care!—you are practising it at this very moment. You are saying a thing that is very foolish, and not true. Now, did it never strike you that, if you go about the world flinging civil sayings of this sort into the ears of all the women you encounter, you will presently burden your conscience with a very considerable number of falsehoods?"

"*I* do such a thing! *I* say civil things to all the women I see! Miss Haig, I declare I have not exchanged six sentences with any woman except—with any woman out of Riverston since I came home! Who has been accusing me?"

The tone was excited and hot; the face, as I saw it suddenly, flushed to the brow. I broke out laughing.

"Mr. Frank, what are you falling into a passion about?"

"I am not in a passion—I——"

“No—you are as cool as a piece of ice. Perfectly composed and sweet-tempered.”

“I want to know who has been talking to you about me?”

“Nobody. Who do you think would take the trouble?”

“Then what did you mean?”

“I should rather ask that of you. My meaning was simple enough, if you would have let me explain it.”

“If I would have *let* you!”

“What I was going to say, Mr. Frank, was this. In our correspondence together—yours and mine—I think you will find presently that we shall get on all the better if we let extraneous civilities and compliments fall to the ground. I am not fond of compliments—I never swallow them with great satisfaction even when I believe in them; and for the most part—for I am not naturally civil myself, and have a consequent distrust of the civilities of other people—I do not believe in them at all, and would infinitely rather have nothing to say to them. Do you understand me now?”

“I understand,” he answered quickly, “that you think I have been doing what I never did in my life—to *you*: that you think I have been saying more than I have meant, instead of meaning—instead of meaning,” he hurriedly ejaculated, “more a hundred times than I ever ventured to say.”

I raised my eyes, for his tone surprised me, and on Frank Wynter’s face I saw a look which it grieved me bitterly a moment afterwards that I had seen. It was a look such as, for the first time, made me remember that, boy as I had fallen into the habit of thinking him, he was older in years than I. A spasm of pain shot over me—a swift illumination, too—a comprehension on the instant of that growing look upon Miss Kingsley’s face—comprehension that, spreading wide, made sudden clearness out of much that I had dimly understood before.

The sound of Frank’s hurried words was still upon my ear. Gladly enough would I have been rid of him, but riddance at that moment was impossible; even silence was impossible, for, had I

given him that, I should have given him the last thing that I desired to bestow. I answered laughing—

“An honest confession, Mr. Frank! Depend upon it, if sincerity were a virtue more in vogue, we should all now be making the same declaration. However, reserve too has its advantages.”

“*You think so*”—with an air of slight vexation.

“Most decidedly I think so. So do you—so do all sensible people. But—here our walk terminates. I do not want Effie to go any farther.”

“Well—are you going to sink into the earth?”—with opening eyes.

“No, but we are going back, and you, I suppose, will prefer to go forwards.”

“Alone!—that is very likely!”

“A solitary walk is an excellent thing.”

“If you had had as many solitary walks as I have, Miss Haig, on the deck of the Dragon——”

“I should probably have been exceedingly seasick. My walks upon any deck whatever, I imagine, are likely to be tolerably short ones. Now, Effie,

are we to go back as we came, or are you strong enough to follow the road ? ”

She chose the longer way. It was somewhat of a rough walk, for the path we had to tread was hilly, rugged, and uneven, rising at times to a considerable height above the carriage road, at others descending almost to a level with it, though separated from it always by an impetuous stony-bedded stream—a feature in the landscape picturesque enough, especially at points where the rocky banks, rising steep and high on either side of it, gave to its aspect the appearance of a rent gully.

We had traversed this way for a quarter of a mile ; we were upon an eminence some twenty feet above the road, when looking through a break in the edging trees upon that road, suddenly my eyes perceived and grew riveted upon an advancing figure. A broad-shouldered, stalwart shape I saw—a head portentous-sized, garnished with falling locks—a step I knew—a carriage right familiar to me. I stopped—I gazed—I drank my eyes full of that sight : I raised my voice, and cried my news to them.

"Effie—look here!—here!—it is your uncle!"

"Uncle Gilbert!" she cried.

"Uncle Gilbert?" Frank echoed. "Where? Oh—I see him! Hy, uncle!—Uncle Kingsley!" he shouted.

The cry reached Mr. Kingsley's ears: he stopped, looked round him—looked upwards—caught sight of the group of us as we stood.

"Frank!" he said.

"Miss Haig, come down! We can get across down here. I know the way—come down!"—and away—languor and illness forgotten—Effie flew.

Turning back one moment as I was about to follow her, I saw Frank's eye surveying the opposite bank—himself about to spring. It would have been a leap of eight feet at least, with a depth below him of near three times that.

"Mr. Frank, do not try to leap there!" I cried. "For God's sake, do not: you will break your neck!"

"Break my neck!" he laughed. "How many times, then, do you think I ought to have broken it before this?"

He turned his face carelessly aside to answer me: reckless and daring, without looking to his footing, he advanced another step: he stood poised upon a projecting stone: one instant, and I saw that stone give way; another—and between me and the bank beyond no figure stood.

My voice uttered his name, smiting the air; for there was a crash, a cry, a helpless plunge low down within the water.

“Frank!” I cried.

I pressed my hands a moment on my face; a moment’s paralyzing cowardice froze up my blood—kept my feet rooted.

“Mr. Kingsley,” I cried aloud, “help him! Mr. Kingsley, are you coming? Help him!”

Up the steep bank Mr. Kingsley came, crashing the underwood beneath his feet; he reached its summit—he stooped to its inmost edge; a moment more, and my strained ears caught these words—

“Frank, keep your hold—keep fast where you are! There are no bones broken, are there?”

Not motionless did I wait to hear Frank’s answer. Swiftly as Mr. Kingsley himself had advanced,



so swiftly now did I. I stooped above the chasm, I bent low, I saw Frank Wynter as he hung midway down its descent, his torn hands holding to the rock, his face ghastly enough and bloodstained—but living, breathing, parting its lips to speak.

“I don’t know how I am to get up, uncle: I can’t use my foot. Confound the thing!—what am I to do?” he cried.

“What is it? Is your leg broken?”

“I don’t know—no, it is a twist, I think; but I can’t put it down. Ah, Miss Haig!” and he glanced up with an attempt to laugh, “you see what happens to me when I disobey you!”

“Do not hang there doing nothing. Before your foot gets stiff try to exert it.”

“Very easy advice to give! I wish it *would* get stiff! It is so limp now that I can’t rest an ounce weight upon it. Ugh! I feel as if I had snapped all the sinews.”

“Mr. Kingsley, can you not help him?”

“I will help him immediately. I think you had better go home.”

That tone was very subdued and grave: I

looked at his face in quick alarm: it struck me that he might think Frank's injuries greater than I believed them to be.

"Let me stay! I may be of use."

"You will be of more use if you will go home and send back people fitter to help us."

"Mr. Kingsley——"

I looked to him one moment with a gaze of earnest inquiry: he raised his head—he met my look—he returned it—he gazed one swift instant full into my eyes.

What did he see in me?—Good God, what did he see in me to bring that mute agony of reproach upon his face?

"Yes, uncle, send her back. Miss Haig—go home! go home! If I see that white face of yours watching me, I shall neither be able to move hand or foot. Go home and prepare for us; I shall want the whole house to nurse me this afternoon!"

*Was my face so white? Had a moment's fear stamped such a mark on me?*

I turned away with a dull pain—an empty hun-

ger at my heart. Was this our meeting? this the return for which I had weakly counted hours and days? my spot of sunshine? my looked-for cup of wine?

“Effie, come back—come home with me! My child, where have you been?”

She was gazing at me as I turned, mute and alarmed. I had to soothe and reassure her. She had run down to where the banks of the stream were low, and had been waiting for us, amazed at our non-appearance. I put her hand in mine, and took her home.

An hour afterwards Frank Wynter lay in the drawing-room, his sprained foot bound up, his various wounds—they were mere scratches—attended to; himself, spite of the pain that he endured, in a flow of high spirits, insisting upon talking, insisting upon being nursed and amused, calling lustily for the attendance round about him of half the inmates of Riverston.

“Mother, I am thirsty—I want whey or lemonade—which is the fittest for me? Effie, can you make lemonade—with plenty of sugar in it? I

think that bandage is too tight. Look, mother, ought it to press me so round the ankle? Miss Haig, why do you sit there? What are you doing? I can't see you."

"My dear boy, how can you go on talking so! I am sure, with the pain you must be in, it would be a better thing if you would try to go to sleep. I wish I had got your uncle to carry you up-stairs to your room at once. He has gone away somewhere now: Effie, do you know where he has gone?"

"My dear mother, if you talk of getting my uncle to carry me another foot any where, lame as I am I shall rise and fly from the house. I feel bruised all green and blue where he has griped me already."

"Frank, will you try to go to sleep?"

"Is it my duty, mother? A necessary thing for an invalid?"

"My dear boy!—Come, we will draw the curtains, and be very quiet. Turn you your face to the wall, and I will put a cloak over you, and you will be asleep in ten minutes."

“No—no!” vigorously—“I don’t like my face to the wall! I don’t think that is the way at all, mother. I should like to be *put* to sleep.”

“Frank, I don’t know what you mean! You don’t want me to sing to you?”

“I should be very glad if you would. But, at any rate, somebody can read to me. Miss Haig, what book have you got there?”

“Something that would do you little good—German.”

“The very thing! I shall not understand a word of it! Nothing like an unknown tongue for setting one to sleep!”

“Mr. Frank, you had better get some one else to read English to you. I am going up-stairs,” and I rose.

“Not for ten minutes!—not for ten minutes, Miss Haig! Nobody knows how to read but you; no other voice could set me to sleep. Now, Miss Haig, when my mother says I must have repose!”

I sat down again—it mattered little enough certainly.

“But I cannot hear you there—come nearer. Mother, I want that chair for Miss Haig.”

“I am coming no nearer. The further off the better, Mr. Frank, if you want to sleep.”

“You will never do any thing but in your own way. Well—try now; but I don’t think at that distance it will succeed.”

I began to read. It was a book of German verse—selections from German poets. I knew well enough that, as he said, he could not understand a word, and, indifferent to what I selected, I read straight on. Mrs. Wynter and Effie as I commenced were hovering about his sofa: at the far end of the room, mûte and unsympathetic, sat Miss Ursula. Presently the two first stole away: at the close of a few minutes I had no other auditors except Miss Kingsley and Frank.

I read for a quarter of an hour: then I ceased. Instantly Frank broke the silence.

“Wide awake still, Miss Haig! I told you it would not do! Where you sit there, I can neither hear nor see you.”

“Then allow me to suggest, Mr. Frank, that

you must be losing the use of your eyes and ears."

I rose up: I laid down my book.

"I will give up going to sleep: it is a senseless thing to attempt at this time of day! And here has my mother half smothered me with these cloaks. I declare, Miss Haig, she has put a pin here! Look!—for mercy's sake take this thing away!"

"Lie still—I will move it: you are only entangling yourself."

"And, Miss Haig, do look to these pillows. I know you can arrange them better than any body. Thank you!—Yes—so—not too high. Capital!—that is just the thing!"

I had stooped over him: as he leant back my arm had nearly touched his hair. While I so bent, behind me the room door had opened: a moment afterwards I rose and turned. A figure was departing, silent and swift: ere it was gone my eyes had seen a double sight—Miss Ursula's face, and the head and the dark locks of Mr. Kingsley.

“Will you have a book? Are you reading any thing? There—that will amuse you.”

Abruptly I spoke—abruptly I caught up something—a volume from the nearest table, and held it to him.

“But why? Where are you going?”

He looked at me, he stretched out his hand: it sought, not the book, but the arm I had extended. His fingers touched me; sudden, setting my teeth at their contact, I flung them off. I threw down the book upon his couch.

“It is there if you want it. You can reach it. I will send your mother to you.”

“Miss Haig!” he started forward on his elbow—“what do you mean? Miss Haig, what have I done?”

His humbled voice—his earnest startled look—recalled me to myself: I turned a moment back.

“You have done nothing. Frank—lie down.”

He lay down again obedient, his eyes still on my face, a gentle, half-boyish smile beginning to curl his lips.

“Thank you for the book. Where is it?”



I gave it into his hand.

“Some one will be with you soon.”

“I don’t mind—don’t trouble any one—I can read.”

It was long afterwards—long after dark when I entered that room again. They were nearly all assembled then—Mr. and Mrs. Wynter, Mr. Kingsley and his sister, Helen and Frank. Mrs. Wynter was sitting by Frank’s side : to her I went.

“I want you to come with me : Effie is not well—I found her lying down just now. She is very feverish. I am afraid it is the beginning of a bad cold.”

“Get her to bed, and put some flannel round her,” Mr. Wynter advised.

“She would not thank you for that, Mr. Wynter. She is hot enough already.”

“Is she, poor puss ? Well, get her to bed at any rate. And give her some antimony, mamma.”

We had got to the door : Mr. Wynter suddenly called me back.

“Come here, Miss Haig.”

“Yes !”

"Come to the light a moment. Have *you* got cold, too?"

"Not the slightest."

"Fever?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"Nothing. Don't keep me, please."

"Honor was frightened about Frank," Helen said—I could have struck her lips!—"I don't think she has got over it all day."

"A clever explanation, Helen, but not a correct one. I am tired, Mr. Wynter—and I am going to bed: so good-night."

He had drawn me to the table by which Mr. Kingsley sat. I stood near to him—close by his side—so near that my hand could have touched his. He was reading, his head bent, his brow resting upon his open palm. Once, as Mr. Wynter questioned me, he had looked up. That look had traversed my face, made its interpretation from it, sunk swift as it had risen. But to me it had borne no message. Its glance had shown me only a

pallid cheek, lips firmly pressed, an eye earnest and keen.

I had said my good-night: one instant after I had spoken I still lingered. Had Mr. Kingsley moved, had he once more regarded me, had even his closed lips once parted, I would have spoken now—I would have put forth the hand that was fainting to be clasped by his. He did not move. Motionless he sat as stone. I passed him in silence: I gained the door: I closed it between me and him.

“Miss Haig, I am so very very tired—I think I shall be asleep in five minutes.”

Effie was laid in bed: she wearily uttered these words as I stooped down to kiss her.

“Go to sleep then, my darling; I will sit here by you.”

“You are too tired.”

“It will rest me. I am tired—but I should not sleep if I went away.”

I bent my head to her pillow: she crept nearer, and put her arm, feverish and hot, across my neck. Thus she lay still for ten minutes. Then came

slowly an uneasy stirring—a fretful, restless movement—finally, a distressed appeal.

“Miss Haig!”

“Yes, Effie.”

“Miss Haig, I wish you would not lie so. It keeps me awake: it is how Nelly used to lie—when Mr. Beresford died.”

“Effie, you are fanciful to-night. There—I will sit up; that will not disturb you. Now, mousie, lie still.”

There was a lamp in the room, but it burnt under a shade. We were enveloped by a dim twilight; by that faint illumination I saw her great eyes rise upwards to my face. A moment afterwards she was speaking again.

“I was unhappy—I thought you must be crying.”

“I! Nay, Effie, spare yourself that fear always. Crying I was not, assuredly.”

“People lie so when they do. Once I saw mamma—long ago—and then there was Helen—and then”—the voice died off inarticulately.

“Effie, is your head aching still?”

"No—not much. I am better, I think—only so very very tired."

"Shut your eyes again; you will sleep soon."

I folded her hand in mine. She fell presently into a slight uneasy slumber: I waited some time, trusting that it would deepen and grow calm: it did not. After half an hour some sound—the slamming of a door below—again awoke her. She opened her eyes suddenly, looking up with a smile.

"I knew, if they tried, they could have helped them! I am so glad *you* did it," she said.

I put my hand before her eyes: without resistance they closed again at once: she turned round, and fell, after a few moments' murmuring, into a sounder sleep. Gradually that sleep grew deep and heavy: when no slight movement was likely to disturb it, I rose and at last left her.

It was still but little more than ten o'clock when I entered my own room. Long had the day seemed—yet sleep was still far from me. I undressed, I put out my light; then I paced the room to and fro. The night had neither moon nor stars; motionless clouds obscured the firmament, winds

moaned in distant hollows. Deliberately I walked till my limbs were weary. *That* kind of fatigue I craved—that weariness would insure me sleep. Gratefully when it came I welcomed it. When midnight was chiming on the air without, I lay down—and slept.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

THE sun rose bright. An autumn morning, warm and silent, rich with deep hues, stained with no moisture of decaying summer, no mournful dropping down of withered leaves. A day to think of harvest fields, of autumn fruits, of nutting in ripe woods—serene and hopeful, wealthy and clothed with summer's garnered riches. But *we* recked little of its joy or of its beauty; for Effie, the brightest rose of Riverston—the sunbeam of the house—Effie lay ill.

Sudden and swift she was stricken down. It was no slow approach of sickness; fever and pain came not to her with dallying steps; bold were their strides, swift their advance. Throughout the

house, rising with a start of quick alarm, heart after heart leapt up to find her ill.

I had this day awakened with no swell of soft emotions in me; with little in my mood to fit me for the task of bending over sick pillows; rather in a temper that would have led me forth where keen winds blew keenest—where the struggle of contending elements might crush me to submission—their bitter strength teach me the wholesome lesson of endurance. But the shadow of Effie's sick-room had summoned gentler thoughts; the passions that had stirred me lulled, the emotions that had clung about myself and my own interests expanded, softened, with new impulse rose up and flung their arms about my child. The change they wrought in me, God knows, I welcomed: the gentler call upon those energies that, in the fever of the night, had been stirred to a galvanized vitality—the mitigation of that sense of suffering which had been quickened to an edge too sharp to deal salutary chastisement—I thankfully accepted. Content to forget myself I stooped to my child's pillow; I kissed her heavy lids, I



moistened her hot brow, not callous to *her* suffering, but with my heart eased from its bonds, cleared from its bitterness,—sustained, not by offended passion's tonic, but by love's sweeter strengthening.

This new spirit—could they not have let me keep it? This soothing forgetfulness—need they have reft it from me? This hush from fear—this calm repose, where hope stood silent at least, not vanishing if she did not speak—might they not have left me these?

Nay, leaving these to me, their victory had been gone; leaving me tranquil, hopeful, soothed, my strength had come to me again; goading me to no fresh pain, stinging me to no new indignant protest, the half-roused fever in my veins had departed from me.

Not to me was this kind boon—this salutary respite—given. Before my pulses had rested from the hot beat of their late-stirred blood—before the roused barbarism of my nature had laid aside its late-seized arms—another blow was struck on both. Reader, listen to the voices that inflicted it. Truly

the hand of an enemy had struck the key, but to my nearest and dearest was it given to send the iron into the flesh.

“Uncle Gilbert,” the child’s voice came plaintively, “will you not ask if I may get up? I wish I could get up: I want to lie down-stairs on the sofa, as Frank did yesterday.”

“My darling, you are better here.”

“No, no,” sorrowfully; “for no one will be with me here. Miss Haig will go to Frank.”

Effie, what evil spirit is about you?—what tempter sits upon your lips? And hearken, too, to the answer, with its tone sad and low—quiet and patient—as though *patience* were the virtue at this moment most in need!

“Helen will come to you, Effie: your mother will sit with you.”

“But I would rather have Miss Haig: Uncle Gilbert, if I have to stay in bed, I wish you would ask Frank not to keep Miss Haig; for if he wants her as he did yesterday,” the child’s voice dropped sorrowfully, “and nobody says any thing, she will never stay with me.”

“Effie, if she goes away, can *we* not take care of you?”

Reader, was it timid modesty—was it trembling cowardice, do you think, that kept me dumb as I listened to these words?—was it the stir of any tender emotion that fettered the voice that rose up to my lips?

“Uncle Gilbert, will *you* come sometimes to me?”

“I will come whenever Effie wants me—whenever I can do any thing for her—whenever I can answer her. But my Effie must get well quickly,” and he bent over her and held her in his arms. “My little Effie—my good Effie—my best comfort in all this world!”

“Effie,” and I stood presently alone by the child’s bedside, “when people are ill, though many may help to nurse them, there must be one nurse in chief: who do you want for yours?”

I know not if my voice or my look were strange—in her eyes they might have been. As I spoke she looked up startled; she put out her hand to touch me timidly.

"I will like whoever you say. If you want it to be Nelly"—and her voice fell sorrowfully.

"Do *you* want Helen?"

The tears sprang up to her eyes, she drew back her hand from me; the one word of her reply came so low that I could scarcely hear it.

"No," she said.

My heart smote me; I stood no longer passive by her side; I stooped and put my arms about her.

"My mousie, who would you rather have?"

Swift a smile sprang upon her lips, her eyes were raised, her arms stretched up about my neck.

"I did not like to say; I thought you would not like to come," she whispered.

"You thought that, Effie?"

"I thought you would rather be with Frank. But *I* would rather have you than any body! I would rather have you," and her clinging arms bent me to her bosom, "than any body in the world!"

I had assumed my place—thenceforth Effie's room became my territory: she was mine by her own desire—I guarded her jealously. But from

this day and this hour a spirit of defiance took possession of me. Well I knew that I might still have sought out Gilbert Kingsley—that I might have brought him face to face with me, and raised my voice, and cried my passionate protest to him against his injustice and his cruelty, and that, doing this, I might have ended all estrangement. But was I, who had been wronged, to be the first to come, crying—“This silence breaks my heart—this separation kills me!” Was I, a woman, to pave *his* way of return—humbly to hold forth props to support his weakness—patiently to prompt his faint-heartedness into courage? Nay, that was no work for me!

Reader, do you think that for this temper I ask your sympathy? do you imagine that I plead for your approbation? Mistake me not; I do not. If you have followed me in this history, believing, even once, that I have put myself forward as the estimable heroine of a moral tale—a woman to be admired or imitated—learn now, once for all, your error. I paint myself for you, not as I should have been, but as I was. If an

example is to be made of me—a moral to be drawn from me—I hold that they may be made and drawn as well from my faults as from my virtues.

I said that a spirit of defiance took possession of me ; but not towards Effie did that spirit manifest itself. I might be fierce to others—I was gentle to her ; cold I might be as frost, impenetrable as adamant—but towards her all tenderness that was in my nature turned and was poured forth. She had been dear to me in her health and in her vigour, in her strength and in her beauty ; but she was dearer now as she lay in her helpless sickness—dearer, as with every need she turned to me for help—as with every hour of pain she stretched her arms to me for rest—than ever she had been on the brightest day when her fair, young, glowing face had stood before me.

I watched her as hired nurse never watched : I watched her through each step and passage of her illness : I watched her with a pain that day by day grew sharper in my heart. For the child grew no better ; she grew utterly weakened and

reduced. Before the fierceness of this fever, her strength wasted like snow before fire ; when but a few days had passed we had to lift her in our arms like an infant of a month old. All wasted and shrunk and feeble ; so quiet, too, with a kind of dumb wonder bearing it all ; looking in our faces as we came about her, but slowly ceasing from almost every question ; gradually, even in her fevered wanderings, growing not to speak aloud.

“It seems a long time since Wednesday,” she said faintly once, for she had fallen ill on that day, “as if another Wednesday would never, never come.”

It came ; but it came deep drenched in pain, too keen for words. That day, the eighth day of her illness, a fear entered within me that she would not live. None shared it with me. Me alone out of that house, that pallid terror had made captive of to warn and sicken ; on me alone its touch had fallen, its breath descended. Throughout the day solitary I bore its weight ; like one in torture—longing, hungering to cry out my fear,

yearning so bitterly for companionship, that once, for one moment, breaking even through the hardening wall that my own hands had helped to raise, I turned where I had been wont of old to turn, and let my lips loose themselves of one sob of pain to Mr. Kingsley.

I came to him, wan, sick at heart; I know not what I said—it was some passionate call for sympathy; I cried out to him that my soul was fainting in me. Did I obtain from him what I sought? Hearing me, he raised his eyes in dumb surprise; he gazed on me, he listened mute till I had done; then for response came this—

“No—no—you are mistaken, she is not worse. But *you* are nervous with watching,” so he told me; “you are worn out—you want rest.”

And this was all he had to give me; this for answer to my smothered cry—for reviving water to my parched lips. Silent and fierce I gathered up my misery; that day no tone of it more passed the sealed barrier of my lips.

It was night and I was alone with her, for that night I let no other take my place. It was late,



and all was still. As she was wont, she had begun to drop into her accustomed feverish dreamings, waking up often hurriedly and murmuring inarticulately to herself; after a time, about an hour after midnight, she had fallen into a calmer slumber.

It was two o'clock, and she still slept. For an hour I had sat beside her; I rose up now from her side, and moving softly stirred the dimly burning fire into a brighter glow; I sat down before it on the ground, and, bending to my knees, laid down my forehead on my crossed arms.

Thus as I sat I heard the slightest sounds—the dropping of the cinders on the hearth—the faint tick of the gallery clock through the closed door. Had there been any movement in the bed, that must have reached me too, but there came none; yet, when at length I raised my face and turned it thither, the first sight that I saw was the dark light of Effie's opened eyes.

Wide awake, and gazing at me with a calm, solemn, earnest gaze, over her face, as she saw my look, there flitted the pale faint smile that

was her usual sign of recognition; a moment afterwards, before I had spoken, she called to me to come near.

“Miss Haig.”

“Well, my darling?”

She stretched one of her hot hands out; as I came to her side she stole it within mine.

“Miss Haig, as you sat there,” she said, “you looked like one of the women that they carve over people’s tombs.”

“That was a strange fancy, Effie.”

“Was it? But you did look like it, and it made me think of something. Miss Haig,” she said quietly, “am I going to die?”

Like a naked nerve struck by a careless hand my heart leaped up before that question: my voice came to my lips in an accent strange and faint.

“I cannot tell, Effie! I cannot tell—I hope to God not!”

She looked at me still and unmoved; the silence that succeeded was not broken till *she* broke it, the low dreamy voice coming again

with its thin thread of sound on the night's stillness.

"I have not been asleep for a long while," she said. "I was thinking just now, that I should like us some time to be in a boat upon the sea, and for a great wave to come and drown us all together."

"Effie, my child, if we each one could choose all those we should like to carry with us from this world, the whole earth would soon get drawn into that one boat."

She looked at me with a low sigh, then drew my hand to her cheek, and lay silent, her solemn, deep regard fixed motionless for many moments on my face.

"Effie," I broke the silence presently, "you should try to go to sleep ; it is not good, my darling, to be talking now."

"No," she said very gently, and loosing my hand she feebly turned herself and closed her eyes.

I had had a young sister once, who, meekly settling herself to rest thus, had fallen asleep and

never wakened ; with a keen pang of memory, the thought of that death slumber—of that dumb passing out of life, with its great desolate agony of discovery—fled in upon me. Trembling before that misery, I rose and bent to her.

“ Effie, bid me good-night !”

She opened her eyes once more, and raised her arms. I took them in my own.

“ Sleep, Effie, and grow well,” I said. “ Oh, Effie, grow well !” I cried once.

I laid her head back on its pillow ; I pressed my hand upon her closing lids ; I went away and fell down on my knees, and, tearless and passionate, I smote heaven with my bitter cry—  
“ If I am bereaved of my child, I *am* bereaved !”

When I stood next beside her pillow she had fallen asleep : as hour succeeded hour she slept : when the day broke she slept—a slumber motionless and peaceful, broken by no restless moanings, disturbed by no fevered dreams. When the sun rose, and feet were stirring on the stairs, still she slept.

The house was hushed ; soft steps trod the

passages, and voices near the room spoke in whispers.

Within that room none entered lest they should disturb her : they left us alone together.

I sat by the bedside. My hands were empty, for I could not work ; my eyes rested on no book, for I could not read : in stillness, in inaction, in utter silence, that final vigil passed. It endured for many hours ; it ceased at midday : almost as the hour chimed, while my eyes were resting on her face, she woke.

She awoke—and in those opened eyes what did I see ?

“Have I slept long ? Oh, I must have slept long,” she said ; “it has got broad day !”

She smiled and stretched her hand to me. Was that smile one of death’s signs ? Was that dawning colour upon cheek and lip a seal of the mark set on her ?

No ! and again, no !—with every voice out of my heart—with every leaping pulse within me. Oh, joy unutterable !—not Death but Life shone in that aspect.

Reader, it was so. She was exhausted and weak—she was pallid and thin—she was worn to an infant's feebleness ; but the Reaper had drawn his sickle in, for the harvest was not ripe.

## CHAPTER XII.

## PARTING.

EFFIE lay on the school-room sofa—a little, pallid, slender figure, very feeble and very still.

“She does not look fit to bear a journey—does she?” Mrs. Wynter said.

“Not very fit yet; but a few days will strengthen her now.”

“Do you think so? I wonder if we shall be able to move her next week! Perhaps by the middle of the week—by about Wednesday.”

“Mamma, not so soon as Wednesday!” Effie suddenly broke in. “You said I was not to go before Uncle Gilbert!”

“Uncle Gilbert will be gone before then, I am afraid, dear.”

“Mamma, may I ask him when he is going, that we may settle about Frank and me?”

“If you like, Effie.”

“It won’t tease him?”

“He is not often teased by what you say to him.”

“Mamma”—slowly—“I think, when he first came, things vexed him quicker than they do now.”

“Effie, my dear, that is not a thing for you to talk about.”

“But, did they not?”

“Well, they did, dear—but, hush!”

“Mamma!” she cried, suddenly—“that is his step in the gallery—I know it is his step! Will somebody call him in?”

I went to the door and summoned him.

“Uncle Gilbert”—almost as soon as he came to her—“will you stay longer than Wednesday?”

“What makes you fix on Wednesday, Effie?”

“Because they talk about my going to aunt Maurice’s—but if you would stay I would not go; I would not go as long as you would stay.”



“Am I worth putting off a visit for, Effie?”

“Uncle Gilbert”—she looked up and her eyes filled—“you will go away, and I shall not see you again perhaps for years and years.”

“And that makes you sorry?” he said—“my little one!”

“Uncle, I should not care for any thing more if you would stay.”

“I will stay, then, till Wednesday.”

“And not any longer, Uncle Gilbert?”

“No—not any longer. The house would be very empty to me when Effie was out of it.”

I might have seen his face had I looked up, for, standing as he did, it was turned towards me—but I was sewing, and there was no need that I should raise my eyes. Yet, as I sat thus, dumb and still, what cry was that, that, crushing down my will, leapt wildly to my lips—portent and prophecy of chambers swept and empty.

“Three nights more!” the child said, as that night she laid down her head upon its pillow. “Miss Haig, we are all going away—and the summer is going, too.”

“Do not mourn for the summer, Effie ; if it has gone, farewell to it !”

“But you are sorry, though you say that. And I am sorry, too,” she said ; “for I think sometimes that, if it came back, it would make you look as you used to do. Miss Haig, I think, when we are gone, you will take a long, long rest.”

“Do you think that ? God knows, Effie !”

I laid my head beside her on the pillow ; I closed my eyes. A long, long rest ! Was *that* indeed coming at last to be the goal to struggle for—the prize to attempt to reach ?

There were days succeeding this one, quiet and eventless—a hush, in their outward apparent calmness, from all anxiety and excitement. This quiet was of use to Effie ; this soft repose gave her recovered strength. So well she progressed, that the day first spoken of was soon definitively chosen for her going.

“And Uncle Gilbert will stay and see me off,” she told me one evening, “and not go away himself until next morning.”

It was a week that wore on slowly. I had not been wont to be dully lagging at time's heels—feeling the hours go heavily—pausing and wondering to what work or what amusement I should set myself to speed their journeying: my days had been well filled, my hands not often idle; but at this time the most familiar occupations of my life had grown enveloped in a strange oblivion—had sunk from me in a strange gulf of separation. They with me, and I with them, had ceased connection—parted company. Naked of work, shorn of design, my days rose up before me.

Once, no such barrenness as this would have had long continuance with me: whatever might have been its source, it had gone hard with me but I had ere long ended it; but now the strength that was needed for its destruction was not in my power to give; the bodily strength, without which I could not wrestle with it, was, during these days, every hour more utterly deserting me. I had watched too long and with too fierce emotions by Effie's side; nature, resisting that too prodigal use of her, was now taking her revenge; the debt I had incur-

red she rigorously warned me I must pay ; the waste I had made of her—the too lavish expenditure—for these she demanded restitution.

Sternly she deprived me of the power to struggle with her. She bound fast my energies ; she struck me with a listless, dreamy torpor : the pulses that had beat with pain, the veins that had swelled high with anguish or defiance, these indeed in great measure she stilled ; but for that granted boon she took her price in bodily suffering—a fevered weariness she bestowed—an aching brow—a dulled depression, stealing round and creeping over every sense. Slow were her steps through several days, measured and stealthy her advances ; but, cruel and just, she worked out her revenge as I had made my robbery, portion by portion, step by step.

I took my wages and closed my lips upon them. They only knew in the house that my head ached : that simple confession one morning Frank Wynter drew from me—poor Frank, who patiently haunted Effie's room, and daily tried to wile me back to my old ways, touching me sometimes, even in the

midst of my bitter mood, with a strange gentleness and pity. Poor Frank ! I say again—for I can acknowledge now how it was little fault of his that my life's blood was made to pay for his boyish folly.

That misery of weakness came upon me gradually : on the day when Frank and Effie were to leave Riverston, it had at length reached its highest point. That morning my wearied limbs would scarcely bear me—my feeble, aching head sickened before the necessity of exertion—the sluggishness which had been slowly creeping through my veins this day lay like a leaden weight alike on limbs and brain : vitality, energy, at moments almost consciousness, had cruelly fled from me. I moved beneath this deadly oppression of fatigue like some one sleeping, void of thought—void almost of emotion ; incapable of feeling, even in the near departure of the child whose presence had been for weeks my balm—whose tenderness had been my sustenance—one solitary sensation keen enough to be entitled sorrow. A weary aimless longing that the day were past, a fainting instinct of desire to lay

myself upon my bed in utter silence—in utter cessation of all bodily movement—these were almost the sole emotions that possessed me.

They were to go at midday. Before the carriage had driven round they were in readiness for their journey: for a few last moments, while they waited, we collected in the breakfast-room together—Effie stealing for the last time to her familiar place upon her uncle's knees.

For me, I sat apart from them, and alone, till my solitude presently was broken by Frank's voice. He came, bending over my chair, standing between me and the others in the room.

“What a cruel thing of that headache to torment you so ! And it is worse than ever to-day, is it not ?”

“No, it is not worse, I believe.”

“Can you do nothing for it ?”

“I don't know.”

“I think you want change of air. I wish you were coming with us—or I wish we were all to stay here together. I am sure I don't know why we are going at all ! I would rather have a ramble

with you and Effie over the hills, than go to see all the aunts and cousins in Christendom ! Do you not believe I would ? ”

“ If you say so.”

“ Only because I say so ? Miss Haig,” bending lower and sinking his voice, “ would you want me to go creeping about your footstool for a year, and still need me to tell you at the end of it that I care to please you ? ”

“ I advise you to creep about no woman’s footstool, Mr. Frank ; least of all about mine.”

“ I would rather lie down at yours than at any woman’s breathing ! ”

“ Hush ! ”

“ You may say ‘ hush ! ’ a thousand times, but that will not make it the less true. You are always saying ‘ hush ! ’ and always treating me as if I was a boy ; ” and on the fair bright face there rose a quick hot cloud, that took the sunshine out of eye and lip.

I did not speak, for life in me to raise hand or voice in soothing there was none : the listless torpor of

my mood needed the sight of a greater pain than this to stir it. I sat silent, and the pause that followed he was the first to break.

He came back to me, for he had risen and half turned away—his face once more open and fair, and flushed no longer with anger, but with a boyish blush of generous feeling.

“What a wretch I am to come teasing you!” he cried, “worrying you when you can scarcely hold your head up. Now, will you forgive me, and I won’t utter another word? You cannot be so angry with me as I am with myself. Will you forgive me, Miss Haig?”

“I am not angry.”

“Are you not? Are you really not?”

Looking a moment in my face, he suddenly bent down and seized my hand. He took and held it—nay, more; ere he released it, stooping lower still, he quickly touched it with his lips. Standing as he did, between me and the other occupants of the room, he thought, I believe, that this action was hidden from them: *I* do not think it was. As he hurriedly rose, turning swiftly from me, I met



another glance set on my face beyond that deprecating one of his.

He was gone, and my anger could not fall on him ; but where his lips had pressed, stung by a moment's indignation from my lethargy, I struck my palm and ground the flesh. Fool ! to add this torture to me !

“ The carriage is here. Now, Effie ! ”

Mr. Wynter's voice sounded through the open door ; the child responded, and, rising, stood beside her uncle.

“ Miss Haig,” she said, “ come ! ”

Listless again and dull, fallen back into my dreamy stupor, I rose mechanically and followed her.

Once more—“ Miss Haig ! ” and the child stood before me, her arms raised to my neck, the tears swelling in her soft dark eyes, sorrow of parting, that I could not feel, quivering in the straightened lip.

“ God bless you, Effie ! Don't stay long away from me ! ”

I kissed that trembling lip, close and long ; then I sent her from me. As she went, a new hand seized mine.

“Miss Haig, I shall count the days till I am back again ! Good-bye !—good-bye a hundred times !”

I fell back and leaned my arms over the corner of the stone balustrade, for giddiness almost to fainting was stealing over me : feeble and dizzy, I stooped my brow to its cool surface and closed my eyes. Around me the stir of departure sounded in my ears as a dim uncomprehended confusion, a medley of voices whose meaning I scarcely knew—whose connection with myself I could not gather consciousness of, even when through it I heard the sound of my own name called. To that low call I gave no answer ; it was too feeble to arouse me to any motion of limb or brain : it was not until a second summons reached me—a call quick and loud enough to startle my torpid senses to activity—that for the first time I looked up.

It was Frank’s voice that had roused me ; but it was not on Frank’s face, as I raised my head, that

my first glance fell. That look enclosed a face dark and cold, colourless to the hard-pressed lips, stern with angriest, saddest disapproval, bewildered with bitter pain. I looked, and read its meaning.

Out of all giddy dreaminess—out of all feeble fainting languor, that reading brought me. *Half* roused I had been before ; roused wholly I was now, as ever was wild animal in its agony. Good God ! that he should think that I stood thus, baring my lovesick feebleness to every eye in Riverston—choosing the very doorstep to parade it on—flinging so utterly from me all instincts of my nature—all articles of my woman's creed, that in Frank's very face—in the face of his father, his mother, his sisters—he should dare to think I laid myself to moan in this attitude of weak despair and misery !

“Miss Haig !” again there came that call upon me—“I wanted you !—oh, Miss Haig !”

The carriage wheels were moving ; the child's voice came plaintive and reproachful towards me : with sudden impulse I sprang forward and caught the little hand held out to me. I caught and kissed it.

“What was it, my darling?”

“Nothing more—that was all.”

Smiling through wet tears she looked into my eyes: that glance was the last I had of her: another moment, and, a dozen paces from the house, I was left standing alone.

“Honor, come in—it is cold.”

It was Helen that called me: turning mechanically round, I found that only she and Mrs. Wynter remained by the open door.

I came back to them, I entered with them into the house; passing them in the hall, I paused no more till I stood within my own room. Till I *stood*, I said—but, alas! I did not stand: reaching that resting-place, oblivion came upon me: I wakened to find myself prostrate upon the ground, feeble and bruised, a faint sick pain shooting through head and limbs—that pain strangely contending with the dulled sensation of another suffering, bitterer and fiercer than bodily anguish.

All day, lying restless on my bed, I stayed within the solitude of that room. They let me lie in peace. I closed my eyes: when, once or twice, they came

to look at me, they thought that I was sleeping, and stole back in silence. Thus the day passed ; but at evening—impelled by a wild yearning that even exhaustion could not still—I rose and crept downstairs.

Into the drawing-room where, the night set in, the sitters were grouped together, circling round the lamp. I took my seat apart from them, in silence, by the fire—at one side next the wall, where no blaze fell ; and I drew a book upon my knees and opened it. But vain and soon deserted was the effort to read.

For hours I sat, shading my eyes from the bright lamp-light—closing them utterly sometimes—sometimes, when the room was silent, for a time losing almost all consciousness, falling back helplessly into the dull heavy stupor against which I was now fighting my last fight. Only when they spoke could I rouse myself from this state : hearing their voices, I could summon attention ; I could listen—comprehend—even for a moment waken emotion—and that of a sort that was keen enough, God knows!—swift enough—bitter enough, to make

it well that its shaking of my feeble frame endured but for an instant.

Through hours that, passing leaden with weight, yet chilled each pulse to sickness as, one by one, they closed, I sat and dumbly waited for the end. A few occasional words addressed to me in kind inquiry—the gentle touch about me of one or two kind hands—these, through the long evening, were the sole interruptions to my solitude. Amongst these, once, and only once, the voice and the touch were Mr. Kingsley's.

He came to me at a slight movement that I made—a momentary suppressed start, given at finding a pillow fallen when I was about to lean back upon it: with his quick eye detecting that motion when no other saw it, he rose and came. Unseen by me, for my eyes were closed, he sought the cushion, raised it, reset it in its place; then wakened my slow intelligence suddenly by his voice.

“Now lean back.”

I opened my eyes, and found him standing by me: asking no questions, passively obeying, I

leant back—I laid my head upon the pillow he had brought.

He asked me—“Is it right?”

I answered—“Yes.”

He stood a moment by my side in silence, the hand that had held the cushion keeping its hold still: looking upwards through my shadowed eyes, with a strange, struggling, beaten emotion—a strange shuddering of pain—I saw the face above me, its pallid hollowed cheeks, and the lines new-set about its lips.

He said in a low voice—

“Can I do any thing to give you ease?”

Quietly and coldly I answered—“No;” and he turned away.

I pressed one hand across my eyes, and one hand upon my heart. Had he and I at that moment been alone together, God knows if my soul’s impetuous “Yes!” might not have burst my lips and brought him back to me! Strong and fierce for an instant, the pain of its unuttered longing rose upon me; but oh, torment of paralysis, crushing and beating down all power of will!—oh, deadly

oppression of dull bodily pain, coiling its poisoned breath, like vapour from some foul malaria pool, round limb and heart and brain—what voice could speak, what cry surge through you? Like the rest, *that* pain too departed—its agony and its wild crying sinking and perishing, as the wild helpless cries of drowning men perish and sink at sea.

I moved no more until the final moment came. They had risen up, and mechanically I also rose. They had lighted their candles ready for departure: before they parted there were some few arrangements for the morning to be made, and standing in a group together they discussed them. This ended, quietly and directly Mr. Kingsley disengaged himself, and walked to where I stood.

I had risen, but I could not stand without support; I leaned my arm upon the mantel-shelf; I was alone—almost in shadow. He stood before me, and put forth his hand. Without looking in my face, he said this in a low voice—

“I shall not see you again.”

I heard and understood him clearly; my eyes, too, perceived his open palm; slowly unclasping my



crushed fingers, I laid them on it. We stood thus a moment, his hand touching me lightly—his eyes not regarding me—his lips dumb as my own.

And—was this all ?

Nay!—fate, cruel as she was, was not *thus* cruel ! something more she vouchsafed me—*something* more her niggard hand let fall to me. He raised his eyes ; and sudden, as we stood face to face, the loose clasp tightened—the close firm grasp of old enclosed me. In a tone that was *not* calm—in a voice that was *not* steady, though it was sunk almost below his breath—

“ We ought not to part as strangers,” he said.  
“ God bless you ! ”

My hand was wrung in both of his. I moved my lips, but there came no voice. Strong and passionate, one moment there flooded over me that great, deep, wild unrest of misery—that agony of tortured kicking at the pricks, before the final seal is set, and the limbs bound. Like a torrent it broke over me—and when its rush was past I stood alone.

That night I suffered no more. In silence I

went up to my room, I lay down in my bed and slept.

Once in the night I awoke, and around me there was no sight or sound: a second time my eyes opened, and grey twilight was creeping through the curtained window, and the house had grown alive with steps and voices. I slept no more. Silent, calm, impassive, dully half-conscious of what was drawing near, but with that consciousness quickened by no pain, I lay and heard them.

With a feeble, aimless curiosity I listened to the sounds that came nearest to me—the heavy footsteps in the room above me—the weights dragged noisily across the floor—the tread slowly descending the turret stair, passing my door, echoing and dying along the gallery. I watched them all, but I had no desire to move or rise; I felt no agony now in my prostrate feebleness. The battle was over, the struggle was ended: as though, with this strife, the whole bitterness of anguish had departed, I lay unmoved and still, with my folded hands before me.

Through staircase and gallery there rushed a

blast of whistling wind ; voices and steps were drowned in it ; then I heard no more—but when at length that shrill shriek ceased with the clang of a closed door, there came upon my ears, below my window, the roll of carriage wheels.

Reader, I was not yet wholly dead to emotion ! Hearing that sound, one glance that looked from outer things, the hush and the oblivion round me—one glance that, looking inwardly, saw in all earth and heaven only one waste vacuity—lightened upon my soul, a shuddering consciousness—a flash of fear—a spark kindling in darkness to one instant's flame and gush of fire. It came—but, swift as it struck its dart, so swift it passed : ere the sound of the departing wheels had died, its sudden pang was vanished, the blaze of its wild illumination gone.

I closed my eyes, and over life and sense and power of thought there came a mist and numbness—a feeling of slow, long-continued fainting. When what might have been hours had passed, I have a dim remembrance of figures round my bed, and the sound near me of familiar voices. But

these only stirred me for a moment ; my senses soon relinquished knowledge of their presence. The rest of that day was a long sleep, disturbed by no event, coloured by no emotion of bodily or mental pain—a long unbroken trance, through which alone one sole vague thought crept in on me—a calm hushed thought, that this still repose was a solemn rest at the threshold of the Gate of Death.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A WEEK AND ITS ENDING.

Not for one day alone did that repose endure. Day followed day, and I neither felt nor suffered: morning and evening, noon and midnight, were alike to me. I was scarcely ill in the common sense of illness: there was no pain to be assuaged, no restlessness to be quieted, little fever to be subdued. I was simply exhausted—prostrated to the earth—worn to the last fibre of my strength: I had not power to guide one thought—to sustain the weight of one emotion: not thought and feeling only, but even memory, had failed me: I did not remember what had passed, I could not recall knowledge of what was to come. Long had I fought against nature, my finite weakness challenging her infinite strength; by this strange

sleep at length she set upon me at one stroke the signet of her victory. Subdued, borne down, she forced me now to recognise her power, but with her power—oh wise, beneficent mother!—her mercy and her tenderness.

I slept and wakened. Slow was that wakening, no flashing over me of sudden recollection—no swift illumination of returning thought—no resurrection of emotion, upspringing at some inward trumpet blast. It came—but with silent gliding steps, a subtle thing that crept upon me unawares—a mute unlocker of the body's fevered pulses, and the heart's strained, quivering nerves. It came, stealing away from me that boon of rest, restoring me in its stead the life I did not want, giving me back the capacity I shrank from taking repossession of. It forced its gifts upon me: when all was given back that I had before, it still added one: it filled my hands with bitter bread, and pitilessly bade me eat the food that I had wrought for.

Reader, ere I had sunk I had suffered keenly, but with indignation, not with submission—with bitterness, not with humility. I had succumbed, wrath-

fully crying—"This pain is no just heritage for me—this misery is not of right my portion! I had borne, rebelling—I had paid for wrong in fierceness—I had flung back, for misconception, defiance—I had fought, revenging the *passionate* disappointment that stung me when I was firmest and gladdest in my trust, with the reckless shedding of my heart's blood. And now—what cry was this, that, ringing through the chambers of my heart, bade me accept the wages I had worked for? What cry was this—was it the voice of a new nature, of an angel risen from the solemn calm of that still week's repose, that, breathing on me, illumined the blindness of my long rebellion—setting within my heart that dawning pain of new and strange humility—wakening in me a sob of passionate yearning for my old allegiance, that, as it rose and swelled and grew, gathered in its strength scorn, indignation, pride, resistance, and burnt them up as stubble before the fire?

I knew not—but I fought no more. I took my bitter herbs into my hand—not as of old I might have taken them, with my unsubdued spirit rising

resentful against the Giver ; I took and ate, watering the morsels with such tears as my heart had never shed. And, lest that heart should murmur, I bound it with a girdle tight about it : I locked my lips, I closed my hands, I cried—“ Afflict me, and I will bear : I will utter no cry—give forth no sob—stir no tortured limb ! ” Oh fool, that would not learn her weakness ! Again the hand that was more strong than mine was bidden to strike my feeble resistance down. Obedient it struck ; and in every vein and every quickened pulse there ran the unresting pain of fever.

For days I endured this torment—the low ceaseless burning of a smouldering fire. Slowly it wasted me ; my energies consumed away before it ; my enfeebled strength died from me. It left in me only power to suffer—power to cry out at last, like him of old, “ Thy hand presseth me sore ! ”

I do not dwell upon those days : they were a martyrdom of soul deep and intense—their pain words do not utter—their tortured suffering words



can feebly picture; their keenest misery and their sharpest pang—the gnawing remorse that made the worst torment of retrospection—would be, uttered in syllables, but as the painted fire to the fire's scorching glow. Yet of days whose bodily pain was a thousand times their feeblest misery; of nights when trouble shook and racked me through long lonely hours—those hours in their still solitude and darkness but a symbol of an untrod path, before whose gate already my footsteps paused and shook; of sobs of pain whose swelling caught and stirred my soul's strong chords, flinging their wild vibrations out—a chaos and a storm of passionate discord; of cries that—when those chords lay broken, riven, and dumb—at the touch of the Master's hand, gushed forth, a swelling wave of weeping, confessing to a soul stricken, bowed down, subdued: of these something I could discover to you, though not all, but, both for you and me, I have bared my heart enough.

Imagine a fortnight gone since I fell ill. Pass on with me now to the beginning of a day.

I had suffered a long restless night of unutter-

able weariness. At early morning sleep, long wooed in vain, came to my succour. I fell into a slumber which endured for several hours ; the sun when I awoke was high, shining across my bed.

I might have lain awake for half an hour when my room door was opened ; bringing with her—as with gentle kindness she often brought—some delicacy to tempt my feeble palate, Helen came to my bedside.

“ You have slept through the whole morning ; that has been well, Honor,” she said.

“ Yes—I have slept since sunrise.”

She stooped down to place the tray that she had brought before me. She set it by my side—a small damask-covered tray, such as was brought me daily, with my invalid’s portion set upon it ; but with something beside that portion set on it to-day—something whose brightness caught and fixed my eye—a glowing hue contrasting with the whiteness that it rested on—a brilliant spray of scarlet flower.

To me hitherto no flowers had been brought—no flowers had I desired ; the sight of this one now

sent a strange flush of suffering over me, recalling all too keenly to memory flowers daily offered by a loving hand at Effie's bed.

I stretched forth my hand and pointed to it.

"Helen, who put that there?"

Her quiet answer came at once—

"My uncle, as I came up-stairs," she said.

I shrank—I cowered—oh, this was cruel! Weak as I was, I cried out—

"Not your *uncle*!"

Surprised, she gazed at me a moment.

"Not my uncle!" she echoed. Then suddenly the lips grew to a smile. "Did you not know?" she said. "Did no one tell you that he came last night?"

Was it a dream? some strange delusion, in which I thought I was awake, yet slept? some fevered fancy, bringing to me sounds uttered by no living lips—thoughts that the disordered working of my restless brain alone gave birth to? Nay, my fevered wanderings took never *this* colouring! Not of return—not of reunion—were the tortured fantasies they bore me; hope of such rapture had

never come to mock me—dream of such bliss had never calmed my aching heart.

“He has to be in London again,” she said. “He is to be here only for one day. He had heard that you were ill ; he wanted, too, to make arrangements with my aunt about her going home ; so on his way he came here. When his business is done in London he will return again, and take Aunt Ursula home.”

Quiet were the words, quiet were look and tone ; but what cry was this, leaping up within my heart ? a cry too great to be uttered by my lips—too wildly rejoicing to take clothing in mortal voice—flashing through heart and soul, a wild sun-blaze of illumination.

He had come. Voice after voice proclaimed it to me, lip after lip stirred with his name ; as though the house were pealing forth its joy bells from mouth to mouth the accents of that glad proclaiming rang. No more I doubted ; I hesitated not ; I credited with every fibre of my being. Already sunlight and warmth had welcomed his presence ; but what mattered even the darkening

winter days—when he had come ? I lay so feeble that my very joy pressed on me almost to fainting ; I lay where eye could not see, nor ear be witness to his presence ; *but* he was come !

Long was that day, spite of the strong excitement and the joyous fever that were in me. The hours through which I waited, listened, watched, seemed endless ; the very gladness that was in my heart lengthened each moment as it filled it. But I was not weary ; those moments were my rest, their slow departure the breath of my repose.

Once—midway in the hours that made that day—my listening and waiting brought a glad fruition. Close to my door, as a hand from without opened it, clear and low I heard Mr. Kingsley's voice. They were no words concerning me that he spoke, nothing that I had to do with ; for aught I know, no thought of me even was at that moment in his mind ; but my ears leapt at and grasped that music as never yet had they clung to the tone of mortal instrument. I hungered and ate ; that food enriched me with sweet nutriment ; strengthened, I lived through the succeeding hours full

and content; I asked no more; that day I craved no richer meal.

But when that day was passed and the morrow rose, it was not so. Upon that morrow I hungered newly; I had grown stronger, and my strength cried for fresh sustenance; a yearning fever, a passionate longing came upon me to rise and end this long imprisonment.

Throughout the morning I wrestled with this longing, I tried to quell it; my wrestling made it rise the fiercer; when midday came I could no longer stay the utterance of it. I was, God knows, most weak in body, but, mercifully, strength of some sort had been restored to me. I was not now the broken creature that I had been; all mental power, all energy and will that God had ever set in me, were coming back. Girt by this resurrection, I bore down opposition: I rose.

It was one o'clock. With my feeble hand on Mrs. Wynter's arm, I stood and passed the threshold of my room; the door I had not crossed since that night when I closed it on me in my torpid misery was behind me now; the weight of that

oppressing chamber was withdrawn ; pulse speaking to pulse in gladness, I stood with the fresh air on my lips.

“Now, my dear, lean upon me.”

I did lean, for as I trod my limbs trembled, and my head grew giddy ; involuntarily I leant heavily, for as she slowly guided me along the gallery a sickness near to fainting crept upon my heart, and drew a veil across my eyes. She stopped, alarmed.

“Oh, come back ! You are as white as death !”

“No—it will pass away.”

“You are going to faint ! My dear—my dear, what shall I do !”

“Let me lean against the wall a moment. Hold me one moment !”

Oh, treacherous limbs to fail me thus ! treacherous blood to cease your course so swiftly !

“If somebody would but come ! Is no one there ? Mr. Wynter ! Helen ! Helen !” she called.

I had closed my eyes, but I had not fainted ; I could not stir hand or foot, but my senses were not asleep. Standing thus I heard a step ap-

proaching, and, ere that step had reached us—sudden, glad, welcoming—a call to hasten it.

“Oh Gilbert, come! Gilbert,” she cried, “come here!”

He heard and came. It was no weak delusion—no fancy of a dizzy brain; he came—he stood beside me; I could not lift those heavy lids, but close to me I heard his voice—upon my arm I felt his touch.

“Gilbert, she is fainting!”

“Yes!”

That one word and no more; but at once, and without hesitation, he lifted me and bore me in his arms. Then I relinquished life and sense.

They returned to me in a new place. I lay extended on a couch, my head on a low pillow, the room around me still and voiceless; but I knew that I was not alone, for closed in a tight firm grasp my hands were held—that grasp no senseless thing, but a warm human clasp, kindled with strength and passion, through which my deadened fingers grew to life. There was no sound about me; I was aware that in this room none other



presence was with me save that one. Like sunshine stealing over me, there came a sense of joy unutterable—a sense of calm untroubled rest, and peace, and gladness, that cast all thought and need of effort or struggle from me.

God knows how long that blissful silence lasted. It fed me as though its duration had been hours, but it endured perhaps no longer than some seconds. Yet, when it ended, it carried not with it dissolution to my joy; its departure was a change, not a destruction; from its cessation a new gladness rose. That close grasp had unloosed, but round about me the hand was lingering still; to my lips it held a draught of which I drank; my brow it touched and cooled with water; my disordered hair it gently smoothed aside; softly it ministered—firmly it kept back all other help—tenderly it watched—it lingered over me. Once, and it was for the first time, as its cool gentle palm lay on my forehead, I raised those eyelids that, for very luxury of joy, I had kept shut till now; and met, as of old—met at last once more—the blaze of the dark eyes upon me. In

that moment my heart rested from its last trouble—closed over its last pain of hunger.

“You are better?” he said.

To me these were the first words he had spoken, and as *words* they came now curt and poor, feeble and barren; but as *music* they entered through nerve and brain, making harmonies with my heart-strings.

“Yes—much better.”

“But she is so weak!” Mrs. Wynter cried. “It was very wrong—it was *very* wrong of me to let her leave her room. I am so afraid she will be the worse for this!”

A smile I had not power enough to repress curled my lips with a strange species of emotion.

“I shall not be worse. I am too strong now to be harmed by this.”

“Too *strong*, my dear!”

She spoke with a tender accent; sweet and tender, too, was the kiss that was softly dropped upon my forehead; but I scarcely heard the one—I scarcely felt the other; my words had brought another response; towards that, and that alone,

my heart leant. It was but a momentary sound, too low for its syllables to reach my ear—a quick, low, pained murmur ; but as it crossed his lips my hand was drawn anew to his, held with strange gentleness, softly smoothed and stroked.

“Gilbert, is she not changed ? There was never much substance about her—but I think we could almost blow her away now with a breath.”

His hand closed upon mine, the fingers ceased their movement, the gentle wandering touch grew suddenly a strong firm grasp. Smiling, I lay content. Let the breath blow—let wind and wave beat—thus held, I was safe anchored.

There are times when we live so utterly in the present, that past and future seem alike obliterated. One such hour was this. I was too weak to look before or after ; the actual seconds, as they lived and passed, were for the time the boundary of my world ; I did not seek to pierce beyond them ; I scarcely understood or felt that each separate one that vanished was diminishing the number of the whole. It was such concentration of life, and thought, and all emotion upon the

absolute present, and, with it, such utter abandonment of pain and fear, that, when at last the end came, I wakened with the barren feeling of one starting out of sleep.

That end came suddenly. When no eye was looking for her, no brain taking thought of her existence, Miss Ursula stood in the vacancy of the opened door. She might have been standing there for moments, or minutes—God knows !—but none saw her till she spoke. Having opened her lips she said not much ; one curt, fierce sentence only did she utter.

“ Give me those keys ! ” she said.

Abruptly and at once that clasp forsook my hand ; with a gesture that was less impatience than sudden pain, Mr. Kingsley started up and turned ; facing her, he spoke—

“ I could not come : I forgot that you were waiting.”

“ So I suppose ! ” she said.

He took one step forward, but he took no more. Ere my heart had had time to sink lower within me, he was once more standing by my side. But

how was the face changed now ! How swiftly had come this thin and haggard look—this darkening trouble in the half-raised eyes !

“Do not say good-bye to her yet, Gilbert ; she will be here until you go.”

Already he had extended his hand, but slowly it was drawn back ; upon my face there flashed—troubled, uncertain, pained—a strange swift look ; upon his cheek a momentary rising flush effaced his pallor. He spoke a few words low and hurriedly—

“May I see you if I come again ?”

I quietly said—“Yes.”

A moment my hand was taken, clasped, bruised even within his ; then—he lingered no longer.

It was two o'clock ; at four he was to go. Slowly and in silence those two hours passed, not altogether unbroken by *any* presence, but by the presence for which I only looked unbroken utterly. He came no more. Once, and only once, the name that was in my heart was spoken.

“If my uncle comes presently,” Helen asked, “will you see him ?”

I said "Yes;" but he never came. In half an hour more, as I lay listening, I knew that all chance of his coming was at an end. Without seeing me, granting me no word, sending me no message, he was gone.

I locked my hands together, I set my lips tight, but I could bear down this pain. To suffer patiently, foreseeing for that suffering a definite duration—a day and hour beyond which it will not reach—is no hard task for any one; for me, who had suffered *without* hope—who had endured seeing no limit, it was a light infliction. A few days—a week—a fortnight at the utmost—and this grief would cease.

And yet there *was* a pang, bitter and strong—a pang of strangely mingled emotions; my different natures fighting in me, the fiercer not yet wholly subdued, not so hushed but that, as of old, it would still rise and cry—"He had no right to lay this on me!" Nor had he. I say it now, seeing all portions of that matter clearer and more calmly than I could look upon them then. He *had* no right; humility reaching to the height to which

his reached was not a virtue ; generosity in renouncing, carried the length to which he carried it, grew near to cowardice. If *I* trusted in myself too much, God knows, the opposite fault was his ; if self-reliance was my sin, self-doubt, beyond all reasonable lengths—beyond all to be required of him by God or man—was his. There is a boundary to every virtue ; from all things upon the earth moderation is a required necessity of excellence ; but in Gilbert Kingsley, in the exercise of more than one virtue, there was no moderation and no limit.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## EXPECTATION.

I HAD from this time but one aim, to which I utterly resigned myself—one object, for the attainment of which I exerted every nerve. I strove to recover strength. Languid no longer, I made each hour, if it was possible, show progress: taking my own management upon myself, I submitted to no coercion: holding my end steadfastly in view, cautious and sure, I advanced step by step, and each day's close admitted me nearer to my goal. With joy unutterable, that ran through me like laughter, I felt life leaping back through every vein, strength taking root again in every muscle. With glad stir of rejoicing the old familiar self rose to its fresh existence—the old vitality and energy—the old irrepressible hope and fearlessness



—the same in essence, though stained less by bitterness and pride, less ready for indignation and rebellion. I had become calmer, humbler—I think wiser ; though in nature, I repeat, still unchanged—still ready, as of old, at need to face the battle with the old battle-cry, “God and my right !” springing from heart and lip.

It was like life from the grave—like resurrection—like the gladness of spring after the long storms of winter—this return to bodily and mental health. My sickness departed, my pain stilled, I rose a new creature : with hope like fresh fallen dew upon my heart, my whole being grew reanimated. Strong was my faith ; no restless doubt I let assail me—no torment of fear I let abide within me. A few days longer waiting—a few days more gathering up of strength—then he would come !

I had received a fortnight ago, and had been almost forced to accept, from Mrs. Maurice a kind invitation to go to her house when I was stronger. I was strong now, and able to face the journey—but I was not ready yet to go.

“I will go”—I told them—“to fetch Effie back

—but Effie will not be back for a fortnight, and I do not want to be a fortnight away from Riverston. If Mrs. Maurice will take me, I will go to her a week before Effie comes back: I will go, if she likes, this day week.”

“Next Friday? That will be the day after the Kingsleys leave us?”

“Exactly.”

I wrote to Mrs. Maurice and fixed that day. The Kingsleys were to go on Thursday. On Wednesday—no sooner—Mr. Kingsley had written to say that he would be again at Riverston.

Between me and that Wednesday there lay four unbroken days: I told up their hours, and counted them off one by one. I counted them at night before I slept; I counted them joyously at morning when I wakened; I said all day as the parcel of them lessened and lessened—“The time is near! relief is coming!” There was sunshine in those final autumn days—skies not entirely clouded, and trees not utterly bare. Where that sun shone most brightly, and where most tenderly those summer traces lingered, thither I went daily. I

notched on a tree the number of the remaining days ; each day from that number I scored off one : so many visits more—then he would come ! I watched sunrise and sunset, I watched dawn and twilight, I watched noon and midnight : to me all had but one signification, one voice—a cry to herald his return.

And the day broke at last ! It was a full fortnight since he had departed ; strong and well—joyous in heart and life, that day I rose. I stood up in the broad, full sunlight—I stood before my glass and shook down my hair about me, letting the curls cluster round my cheek, where the bright light brought out their gold—where the light too shone within my eyes, brightening the warm tinge of health and hope on cheek and lip. I stood there very joyous, with a thought across me of the evening when his voice had told me—“You are very beautiful ;” but I proudly knew that no living eye had seen me as fair as I was now.

Bright looked the earth on that November morning ; the sunlight shone and played on reddened leaves, and sucked the sparkling dew out of

the grass, and flung round radiance over the cloudless sky, and lighted dark-clothed Riverston with jewels. I marked the shadows as they slowly lessened from the west; ere they should creep eastwards—he would be here! For though no hour had been mentioned by him, we all with one consent spoke to each other as though he would come early.

“About midday,” we said—and already, before midday struck, we began to look for him. At my window, where, when the leaves were fallen, I could catch here and there a glimpse of the distant road, I stood and watched. But I watched till midday was long passed, and another hour sent forth its solitary stroke—in vain.

Then we said—“He cannot be here till evening.” It was but the delay of a few hours; I could be patient—I could wait.

I did wait—my heart high with hope, fearless with faith; I waited till the sun was down—till it was dark—till once more through the gloom it was time to watch. And then for another hour I watched—and he came not!

“He must have meant to come, or he would have written,” they said. “Now he cannot be here before to-morrow.”

No—I knew that; he could not be here before to-morrow—I knew that before they spoke. Hush, then, restless heart—to morrow will come. Ay—it will come!—but oh night, speed—speed your passing! long hours, be pitiful, and give me sleep!

Morning once more, and morning with fresh hope, for there was neither letter nor message: surely, then, to-day he would come! Oh, to-day he *must* come, for it is my last!

The light shone newly upon the earth; heavy again lay the shadows on the sunshine; coward, who lying wakeful had grown pale, call colour back into that whitened cheek—light to those eyes; be ready to meet him—for he will come!

Reader, I made ready and I watched all day. I watched with hope, till hope would stay with me no longer: I watched with fear, till fear mocked at me: I watched with despair—and *she* was faithful and abided with me: he never came!

The day was over ; it was dark night, a wild wind heaving through the trees, the stars lying hidden behind drifting cloud. Where that wind roared and battled fiercest—where above me the bared branches most wildly swung and groaned—into the blackest shadow, thither went I forth, with a cry in my heart that might have quelled the night's voices.

My agony and my passionate despair now were impotent ; my anguish had become the anguish of one bound hand and foot. I sat down on the bare ground and let the wind rage round me : I looked for no more light from heaven, I appealed for no divine pity : cowering and crushed I only spoke to utter these words—"Thine indignation lieth hard upon me !"

My bread was turned to stone, my wine to poison ; my life, in the moment that its joy had sparkled highest, was trodden down to shadow and night. Darkness had started up at midday, winter had swept on summer's fields, flowers ready to burst and bloom lay stricken and withered by its blighting breath.

Sitting there, I passionately tried to pray: I strove too, bitterly, to weep: prayer would not come, nor tears. My heart was too choked, my agony too dry. This game had not been played with a *portion* of life's wealth: I had staked *all* upon this cast, and, when I lost, the sole cry that I could raise around me was one cry of desolation.

How long I stayed abroad, unsheltered, in that wild night, I know not. What impulse even drove me in—unless it were some shrinking from the sinking wind and clearing skies, as from things turned faithless to me—I do not know. But at some time, and by some weary instinct, I at last stole feebly back, and crept up-stairs.

I knew not where to go: I had no place that seemed to recognise me, no spot with which I seemed to have connection. Through the long empty gallery I wandered: travelling aimlessly onwards, the school-room door, not entirely closed, showed through its gaping chink a feeble ray of light—evidence of a fire not yet burnt out. I was worn out and cold: coming to that light I paused:

by a languid instinct I pushed open the door wide enough to enter—and I saw—

What wild illumination was this—God-given—flashing light to every dark corner of my soul?

Reader, the room was not empty. The fire was obscured, for between it and me sat Mr. Kingsley.



## CHAPTER XV.

## OVER THE FIRE.

DAY had dawned, heaven's sun had risen : all night and darkness swept away, with one mighty cry of thanksgiving I wakened into life.

I entered and went straight to Mr. Kingsley's seat. He did not hear me. I stood almost by his side and spoke—

“Mr. Kingsley, I am glad to see you ! They told me that I should not see you again before you went.”

He had moved now—ay, started and sprung up, but not that he might greet me the more warmly. He rose to retreat, not to draw nearer ; to regard me with a wild hurried glance of distress

and pain, not to welcome me with smile of eye or lip.

“I did not hear you—I beg your pardon,” he uttered hurriedly.

He took my hand—with or against his will he had to do that, for he could not ignore the fact of its extension, but he took it with a clasp that barely sufficed to hold it.

“When did you come?” I asked him. “How can you have been so late?”

“I walked.”

“From Hastings?—this wild night?”

There was no response: he stood as though he had heard no question.

“We have been looking for you by every train since morning yesterday.”

Again no answer: he moved away and stood where his face was nearly in shadow; but on me, where I was, fire-light and candle-light alike shone full. He raised his eyes to me.

“You are better,” he said abruptly.

I looked at my face reflected in the mirror. Yes, joy had done her work again!—there was her stamp—her glow—her light—her warmth! I laughed gladly as I looked.

“Yes, I am better! I am strong and well now!”

He stirred quickly, and went in silence towards the door. When he had reached it—

“I ought to ask your pardon,” he said suddenly; “I had no right to be here.”

“Your ‘right’ to be here was little in the habit of troubling you,” I answered quickly, “when you entered this room daily.”

His hand was upon the lock, but he did not turn it. Quite still, with his eyes upon me—

“If I once committed a mistake,” he said in a low voice, “that commission is no reason for repeating it.”

“I am learning for the first time,” I answered, “that you *considered* the commission a mistake.”

I had not moved from the spot where I had greeted him first: I stood by the mantelpiece, the

fire burning before me. He did not leave the room. He stood, motionless too, for several seconds; then, abruptly, he forsook his place and came to me—a strange trouble in his face, and in the sad music of his voice—for he spoke at once—a tone that reached very near my heart.

“Why do you use these words? Why do you speak like this to me? Can you not leave the past alone? Can you not let there be peace between us this last night?”

I raised my head.

“What do you mean by peace?—do you mean division?—such as it used to be four months ago? Mr. Kingsley,” I cried, “I had grown into the habit of thinking that the four walls of one room held space enough within them to contain us both.”

He regarded me with his dark eyes fixedly: with their heavy unlightened shadows still upon me, he slowly asked—

“What do you want? Do you want me to stay here?”

"It is not a question of whether *you* will stay."

"Honor Haig," for an instant, but with no gentle meaning, his glance sparkled, "answer me ! Do you want us to stay here together ?"

"Yes—I came here to stay."

He moved without another word, and turned the chair that he had occupied towards me. I quietly put it back.

"Keep your seat : I am not going to disturb you."

I took another chair, and drew it to the table ; I went to the bookcase, and fetched down a volume ; I drew a candle towards me, and opened my book.

What that book was, or what it said to me, I know not, but I read it straight on—from the first page of it ; I never once raised my eyes. I believe there was perfect silence between us for about twenty minutes : when it had endured that time, Mr. Kingsley turned suddenly in his chair and spoke—

"Are you going to sit there all night and utter

no word?" he exclaimed impetuously. "Can you not put down that book for one five minutes?"

I put it down obediently ; looking up—

"I don't want to sit here all night in the least," I said. "On the contrary, I should be very glad to come to the fire—for I am cold."

"You are cold!"

He started up and came to me.

"Yes—I can't feel the fire here at all. Moreover, you don't keep a good fire, Mr. Kingsley, by any means."

"Come here!"

He brought me to his seat: drawing it closer to the fender he set me in it ; he applied his hand to the poker, and stirred the dull fire into a cheerful blaze.

"That is pleasant ! That is a right look on a November night !"

"You like it?"

"I like a bright fire always."

"Why did you not speak before ? How could you sit over there, and get cold?"

“ I did not *get* cold there ; I was cold when I came in. I had been out—down amongst the elms on the hill-slope.”

“ *To-night ?* ”

“ Yes—to-night. I must have been there when you came, or I should have heard you. You look astonished, Mr. Kingsley. Art you not familiar yet with my wierd ways ? Don’t you remember that you have found me wandering before now in strange places ? ”

“ I remember.”

“ And you were indignant with me—accused me of disturbing the robbers, and abused me heartily. Every body else praised me a little that night—but I did not get one bit of praise from you.”

“ Were you out in those thin slippers ? ”

“ Yes—but it is not wet.”

“ Were you out without a shawl—as you are now ? ”

“ As I am now—precisely.”

“ What were you doing ? Were you alone ? ”

“Who do you think would be with me?”

“Somebody should have kept you from going! What were they doing? Was there nobody to take care of you?”

“Who should there be? I am no child, Mr. Kingsley.”

“Is care taken of none but children? Little Honor!” he cried with passionate abruptness, “I have taken care of you more than once!”

“Yes.”

“Are you willing to remember that still?”

“Quite willing.”

He had not sat down again since I took his seat, but had stood, leaning on a corner of the mantelshelf, where we could each see the face of the other well. With a quick gesture he arose from that position now; he strode past my seat; bending down towards the light, where he was invisible to me, he feigned to be occupied in some manner over the books upon the table. It was a diversion not likely to last him long: I sat quiet, and let him



exhaust it, and in a minute, or little more, he was near me again.

He came, as though against his reason yielding to an impulse that he had not strength to resist, but he came at least prepared to remain; for, before he spoke, he threw himself impetuously into a chair. Then abruptly he opened his lips, and abrupt and passionate and unreasonable were the words that fell from them.

“I shall never see you again!” he said. “We shall never sit face to face with one another again! Do you want to go?” he demanded. “Do you grudge me this one last half hour?”

“It was *you* who wanted to go, Mr. Kingsley: *I* did not.”

“I want to *stay* now! Will you stay with me?”

“Yes—I told you so before.”

A moment’s silence—and the voice softened and saddened suddenly.

“I am tired and ill: I am restless and irritable. Will you bear with my temper this last night?”

“Mr. Kingsley, I see you are ill: I saw it at once, and it pained me. You have got deeper lines in your face; you have got streaks of grey, too, coming into your hair. You look older than you did six weeks ago.”

“Do you remember me as I was six weeks ago?”

“Am I losing my memory, do you think?”

“Do you remember me?”

“Yes—thoroughly! As you were six weeks ago—as you were four months ago—as you were the last time that I saw you—in this room.”

“You remember me as I was four months ago? Tell me your recollection: tell me what I used to be.”

“I rather doubt the wisdom of that, Mr. Kingsley, if you are irritable. My memory does not flatter you.”

“Do you think I imagined that it would?”

“You ought not, certainly, for you know I did not like you—I did not like you one bit. When

you were cross to me—and you always *were* cross—and when you used to snarl at me and try to wound me—and *that* you did all day, whenever I came near you—I liked you so little that I hardly cared whether you were civil to me or not. You had a vile temper, Mr. Kingsley—a temper the most trying to live with that I ever encountered. If I had cared for you, I would rather have gone out and wandered shelterless without a roof to cover me, than have sat still and borne it long. If I had cared for you, it would have half broken my heart to bear it.”

“Honor!” he gasped—“hush!”

“I need not hush, for I am only saying what it might have done. I did not like you, so what you said and did made no matter to me.”

“Did they *never* matter?” The question came after a few moments’ silence. “Have you forgotten that evening—Honor!” he cried passionately—“you have *not* forgotten it!—when you burst into tears before me?”

“No—I have not forgotten that. But that evening, Mr. Kingsley, and all that happened on it, belongs to another period. I was speaking of the time when you first came to Riverston. I do not say that afterwards you had no power to hurt me.”

“You remember, then,” he asked slowly, “that after that first there *was* another period?”

“Again, Mr. Kingsley, I tell you that my memory is not failing me: it is as clear as your own. Yes,” and I let my tone quicken—“I remember that there was another period! I remember it well! It was a long glad happy time, when dissension had ceased—when you had forced me to feel that while you were here I had a friend near me—and I had felt it willingly, and had grown to find your kindness very sweet—your sympathy very precious. *That* was the second period. Where it has gone, and why, you who destroyed it ought to know: *I* only know that I have resented its destruction—as I had a right to do!”

There was one instant's silence ; then his answer rushed turbulent like loosed waters.

"Have you no woman's nature in you?" he cried, "that you dare to say this? You had broken my heart! You had trampled it down till the drops of its blood were on the earth: when you had done this, what *rights* were left to you?"

"I had *not* done this, Mr. Kingsley, nor any thing resembling this. You may have broken your own heart—I cannot judge about that; but, if you have, I tell you plainly *I* am not answerable for it."

"You *are* answerable!" he cried. "You saw and knew how every fibre of it was drawing round you—how every emotion of it was centring in you; you saw and knew that perfectly—you were never ignorant of it—you never had your eyes closed! Oh, Honor," suddenly his voice sank low, "I will not reproach you very bitterly! I acquit you of playing with me. You had made up your mind once, I believe, to marry me; but you have been cruel—you have been all but heartless since you

flung me off! This very night—when, like a madman, I *cannot* tear myself away from you—you are making a jest of my heart's agony. Honor!" he rose from his seat, "do you *know* how I have loved you? I never told you! Sit still, you shall hear me now—you shall know what you have sacrificed for that boy's passion. Honor, hear me! My star!—my light!" he cried, "who, from the first hour I saw you, made my heart thrill and throb—against whose power I so long fought and struggled—round whom all that my nature held gathered in it of passionate affection, of intense emotion, at last broke out and rushed like a sea let loose! Oh, my darling!" he cried passionately, "I will not reproach you—you could not help it; yet would to God you had never seen that boy! Would to God—would to God," he cried, "you had thought my affection worth the taking!"

He bent his brow down upon the mantel-shelf, and stood there in an emotion which so shook his

strong frame that every limb quivered. I did not let that last; I rose up from my seat and stood before him.

“Mr. Kingsley, you have spoken; *I* have something to say too, and you shall hear me.”

He lifted himself slowly and confronted me: in the full presence of that haggard, exhausted face, I opened my lips.

“You have spoken of my affection for Frank Wynter; nay, Mr. Kingsley, stand still—you *shall* hear me! You have spoken, I say, of my affection for Frank Wynter: you believe that I love him—you believe that the hope now lying nearest to my heart is at some time to become his wife—to take his name—to be known to all men—to *you*—as Mrs. Frank Wynter? You think that for this fair prospect,” I spoke very calmly, “I have sacrificed the affection *you* would have given me. You have said or hinted all this. Now, Mr. Kingsley,” and my tone changed, “answer me! What *right* had you to think it? What right

had you to believe this pitiful lie against me? What right had you—though a thousand tales were told to you—so cruelly to misjudge me, the woman on whom you had once spent your tenderness—whom you had made rich by your love—who had sounded your heart, and found her shelter in it, and felt her power over it—what right, I say, had you so miserably to misjudge me as to believe it was *possible* for me to leave you?”

He stood with his eyes upon me, with a wild flush on his face, with his hands clenched till the veins started, with a quiver on his lip that, when I ceased to speak and he strove to answer me, made his voice stagger.

“You never told a lie to me!” he said. “Honor!” he cried, “if this be true, say once—say *once* that you have not loved Frank Wynter!”

“I say it: I *never* loved him!”

Was this joy *at last*, that flashed upon his face, kindling its rugged lineaments into such glow of



beauty—firing its wild eye with such light and blaze of radiance ?

Often had he uttered my name before, but never did mortal lips speak it as he spoke it now.

“Honor,” he cried, “come home ! My darling, come home !”

There was but one moment more that I stood alone ; that past, I had gained the shelter that has never failed me since.

Reader, my task is ended : here we part. We have spent some time together ; to you, who have accompanied me onwards hither, it is not without sorrow that my pen finds itself tracing this final sentence, and bidding you in its last word—Farewell !

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